

# **Youth Transition Under Growing Disparities of Wealth, Income and Opportunity**

*A Case Study: Knowsley, Merseyside, UK*

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*“I decree today that life is simply taking and not giving  
England is mine and it owes me a living”*

Still III, The Smiths, 1984

# Preface

One only really gets a sense of how unequal British society is when you have spent time living in a more egalitarian country such as Norway. When the summer riots erupted and spread across English towns and cities back in 2011, it was, it seemed a world away from Oslo, Norway. At the time I found myself constantly repeating that this sort of social unrest which involved many socially excluded young people would never occur in present day Norway. But this left a big question – why did it occur in present day Britain? Is it some inherent flaw with ‘Britishness’, or is it the result of decades of deliberate and reckless policies which have polarised the country between the ‘have’s’ and the ‘have not’s’? Today in the UK, it is estimated that 3.5 million children (27%) live below the poverty line - that is nearly three quarters of the entire population of Norway. At the other end of the scale the richest ten percent of Britons are now considered to be 100 times wealthier than the poorest ten percent. Are we to believe that this is merely meritocracy at work and that such gaps are the reflections of inherent differences in peoples ability to create wealth for themselves?

Three decades of politicians worshiping the logic of the market have created a groundswell of support for unregulated capitalism, but such actions and views are not only, in my opinion immoral, but also damaging to the stability and fabric of society itself. As a famous statesman once put it, “There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.” While Britain may be characterised as a nation where certainly this holds true, rising inequality has become a global phenomenon and even Norway has not been immune to it. I hope, therefore, this piece of work on youth transition in one particularly deprived region of the UK will give the reader a glimpse into the world of

what happens when parts of society are neglected at the expense of excessive personal accumulation of wealth and materialistic gains.

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## List of Abbreviations

|      |  |
|------|--|
| EEC  | European Economic Commission                               |
| EMA  | Education Maintenance Allowance                            |
| EU   | European Union   |
| IMF  | International Monetary Fund                                |
| JSA  | Jobseeker's Allowance                                      |
| NDYP | New Deal Young People                                      |
| NEET | A young person Not in Education, Employment, or Training   |
| NHS  | National Health Service                                    |
| NVQ  | National Vocational Qualifications                         |
| OECD | The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |

# **Abstract**

Poverty and inequality have risen dramatically in Britain since the late 1970s leaving the country today with one of the lowest levels of social intergenerational mobility in the developed world. Drawing upon qualitative research in one particularly disadvantaged and deprived region of the UK, this study explores the impact of social, political and economic change over the past three decades on contemporary youth transition. Set against the current backdrop of economic austerity, diminishing youth entitlements and social exclusion. The research explores five individual biographies from a diverse sample of 28 disadvantaged young people as they carve out their transition to adulthood in adverse circumstances. From this the thesis identifies a number of what appear to be indicative patterns connecting macro socio-economic transformations to the micro environment of young people. Overall, the intention is to illustrate and broaden the current understanding of the difficulties and complexities disadvantaged young people face in their school to work transition in a setting where disparities of wealth, income and opportunity are growing.

## **Key Words:**

Youth Transition / Inequality / Poverty / Social Exclusion / Labour Market Restructuring

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Rationale**

### **1.1.1 Current Socio-Economic Climate for Young People In Britain**

It is widely acknowledged that both poverty and inequality have increased dramatically in Britain since the late 1970s and at rates faster than most other European countries (Butler and Watt 2007:116). Between 1979 and 1990 poverty rose from 13.4 per cent of the population to a staggering 22.2 per cent<sup>1</sup>. Yet, these statistics only tell one side of the story. Simple measures of inequality between rich and poor overlook what could be considered to be more important disparities between generations. Indeed, what is far less well documented is the steady increase over the last few decades in intergenerational inequality<sup>2</sup>. The Intergenerational Foundation Index explains that whilst Government borrowing and pension debt have gradually risen, there has also been an increased shift in favour of older generations as a consequence of higher charges for education, rising youth unemployment, diminishing youth entitlements, and high housing costs (Intergenerational Foundation, 2012:4).

As a result, for over 20 years social scientists coming from alternative political and theoretical viewpoints have warned about a growing ‘underclass’ of predominantly young people<sup>3</sup> trapped at the bottom of the social ladder and

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/2013/apr/08/britain-changed-margaret-thatcher-charts> - accessed 16.6.13

<sup>2</sup> According to the Intergenerational Foundation, between 1990 and 2010 intergenerational inequality has steadily increased rising from an index of 84 to 128 (Intergenerational Foundation 2012:4).

<sup>3</sup> The terms ‘youth’ or ‘young people’ are popularly used to describe those aged between 16 and 25.

excluded from the rest of society (Dahrendorf 1987; Field 1989; Murray 1990, 1994; McDonald 1997). Unfortunately, attempts by both Labour and Conservative governments to tackle this problem have been unsuccessful and in some respects have aggravated pre-existing conditions of social exclusion in an environment where the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen (MacDonald and Marsh 2001; Nayak 2003; Butler and Watt 2007).

Exclusion from society notably includes: consumption patterns, educational opportunities, political engagement, social interaction, and the labour market. The latter is perhaps the most significant, as without a regular income the other exclusions could be considered inevitable in a market driven economy. Indeed, as the political economist Karl Polanyi pointed out over 50 years ago, “Ultimately, the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: It means no less than the running of society as an adjunction to the market” (Polanyi 1957:57). For many of the older generations caught up in the logic and hollow intensity of market involvement, fixated around the ‘consumer society’, there is little sympathy for those that are excluded. The fault some on the right argue, is with the individual not their circumstances (Murray 1990, 1994).

However, the macro economic climate which school leavers find themselves in today is not of their making. Firstly, the irresponsible behaviour from those at the very top of society has left Britain with huge financial problems putting the country conceivably in the worst economic situation since the Great Depression. And secondly, and perhaps more significant, the smooth transition from school to work which characterized the post-war period, and which usually guaranteed life-long work to the working classes, albeit limited in scope, has more or less disappeared. As of May 2013 unemployment in the UK was 7.7% but among young people stood at a record 20.2% just under the 1

million mark (Eurostat News Release July 2013). Arguably, this leaves young people today as the most disadvantaged of all school leavers since the deep recession of the early 1980s. Indeed, as this study will show leaving school and making the transition to the workplace under the conditions we have so far described can be a very challenging, stressful, and frustrating situation to find one self in.

The restructuring of the economy over the last 30 years has seen many communities, especially in the north of England, Scotland, and Wales, which once had traditional state owned manufacturing industries, turned into areas dominated by new ‘flexible’ service sector jobs. Many of these new jobs are run and provided by multinational corporations whose headquarters are far from the communities in which they provide work. As a result, fluctuations within the global economy means that these sorts of jobs come and go producing and reproducing inequalities in areas of little significance to global capital (Nayak, 2003:4). For those communities that are dependent on the private sector this has meant for many school leavers the prospect of long-term unemployment, part-time work, unskilled jobs, fixed-term contracts and more flexible patterns of employment (e.g. zero hour contracts<sup>4</sup>) are now the norm in their local areas<sup>5</sup>.

### **1.1.2 “Capitalism has Won”**

It seems the story of how we reached this situation in Britain has for some in the social sciences been consigned to the history books. Going back 40 years views on how to run a society were very different than today. Full stable employment was the government’s number one policy. The reason for this

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<sup>4</sup> An employment agreement in which a person only works when the employer needs them and so has no regular amount of work or working hours.

dates back to the economic depression of the interwar years. Psychologists and sociologists during that time identified the demoralizing effect unemployment had on the individual and communities as a whole. Work provided structure, identity, and self-respect, and thus, was, and still is considered vital for social inclusion and a healthy vibrant society. Without work researchers argued cohesion within communities can collapse and peoples self-respect deteriorate. Understandably, the shame and stigma of being workless can drive the victim to social isolation. Over time this argument became so widely known that it helped create a public climate in which politicians of all parties' condemned mass unemployment as an intolerable evil (Roberts et.al 1984:238). However, after three successful decades of full employment (in economic terms<sup>6</sup>) following the Second World War, keeping this 'intolerable evil' at bay became harder and harder to maintain and eventually new ideas on how to run the economy entered the political discourse.

The renowned geographer David Harvey (2005:1) has argued that, perhaps one day future historians may very well look upon the late 1970s and early 1980s as a revolutionary turning-point in the World's social and economic order. In China, Deng Xiaoping began the process of liberalizing the communist-ruled economy in a country with over 1 billion people. Paul Volcker was appointed in-charge of the US Federal Reserve and within no time at all began to

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<sup>5</sup> In economic terms this is known as 'greater labour market flexibility' this form of work undoubtedly benefits the capital class at the expensive of the worker.

<sup>6</sup> Unemployment of 3 per cent or under of the working population is considered full employment by many economists.

radically change the monetary policy of the world's largest economy, and in Britain, Margret Thatcher stepped into 10 Downing Street on a mandate to curb union power and stabilize inflation which had plagued the country throughout most of the 1970s. Fundamentally, in Britain and elsewhere, the 1980s saw Socialist egalitarian views of full employment and a strong welfare state deteriorate as the strict control of inflation and the encouragement of personal responsibility became the new policy agenda for politicians to push forward. By the time of the Berlin Wall collapse in 1989 leading to the end of the Cold War - capitalism was left the undisputed champion of the global economy or as Henry Kissinger remarked: "There has been a war between capitalism and socialism and capitalism has won!" (cited in Allen and Thomas 2000:9).

### **1.1.3 Personal Responsibility**

Fast forward to today and for over 20 years now a 'lightly' regulated 'free market' form of capitalism known as Neoliberalism has dominated the world around us. Almost taken for granted since the decline of Marxism, the study of capitalism has become seemingly irrelevant when trying to understand the problems in our society (Miller 1995:16). Every problem is seen as needing its own solution unrelated to others. If children truant, the school and the parents must be disciplined; if parts of the population are overweight then they are encouraged to exercise more; if young people participate in anti-social behaviour then again the parents are to blame. In short, all of these policies have one thing in common; that the poor need to be taught a lesson, and thus must learn to look after themselves and their families better. The system itself is never to blame only the symptoms it causes.

To emphasize this point we need look no further than "After the Riots" the final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel. The riot panel was



set up in the wake of the dystopian vision of Anthony Burgess's "A Clockwork Orange" which seemed to come alive for 5 days in the summer of 2011. Fifteen thousand people, one third of which were young, unemployed, and from some of the poorest communities, took to the streets to riot, loot, and damage town centres across England (Riots Communities and Victims Panel 2012:2).

The 145 page report that followed identified that, "Many young people the panel met following the riots spoke of a lack of hopes and dreams for the future - particularly because they feel there was no clear path to work in an age of record youth unemployment" (Riots Communities and Victims Panel 2012:8). The report continued to suggest that a lack of confidence and aspirations means many young people become stuck in a vicious cycle of unemployability; lacking basic skills that are essential in the service sector, such as, good phone manners and the ability to look an individual in the eye when conversing, are all too familiar characteristics of young job seekers . The solution the panel suggested was for schools to build and develop stronger character in young people before they leave education to prepare them for the transition to the work place (Riots Communities and Victims Panel 2012:8) .

The report also pointed out the damaging impact advertisement is having on the lives of young people. It argued that, "Children must be protected from excessive marketing, while supporting business and not harming commerce." Unlike in other countries such as Sweden and Norway who have banned advertisement geared towards children, the solution for the UK according to the riot report is to introduce brand and advertisement educational programs into schools to raise resilience among children (Riots Communities and Victims Panel 2012:42). The examples highlighted from the report support the claims made in the previous paragraphs: according to the report the problem is

not a lack of appropriate jobs but a lack of character and resourcefulness on behalf of the school leaver. The problem is not mass advertisement but a lack of knowledge and resilience among the young when it comes to physiologically dealing with corporate messages. What these two recommendations have in common is the desire to put more personal responsibility on to the young people themselves to meet the needs of the market economy.

#### **1.1.4 Welfare to Workfare**

Instilling more personal responsibility seems to be the conventional wisdom in tackling social exclusion among young people. Unsurprisingly, this strategy fits of course with the present five year austerity program taking hold in the UK. In a bid to control and reduce the country's debt after the government stepped in to bail out the financial system to a tune of £850 billion, the British coalition government has implemented the largest cuts to public spending since the Second World War (Grice 2009). This five-year austerity program will oversee the loss of up to half a million jobs in the public sector and dramatically reduce social benefits for millions of Britain's poorest (Wozniak 2010). The crisis of capitalism which has expelled many from the work environment becomes the crisis of welfare. As Larry (2007:208) has pointed out, when the market economy runs into trouble it is very rare that capitalism itself is to blame, usually the disequilibrium is placed on the shoulders of the poorest and the welfare that supports them.

Beyond the cloak of austerity, there is, however, as some scholars have suggested a much bigger agenda going on (Harvey 2010, Chang 2003, Jessop 2002). Indeed, to quote President Obama's former Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, "You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that is it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before." The

opportunity under austerity to further root out core post war embedded socialist institutions which stood the test of Margret Thatcher's 1980s restructuring are now finally yielding to the neoliberal privatization of the economy (increased privatization of the NHS, schools, and security to name but a few<sup>7</sup>). In doing so, we are witnessing the transference of additional risk and uncertainty to the individual through increased emphasis on private provision and civil society rather than on state guarantees (Jessop 2002:159). Logically, under these neoliberal policies the individual becomes increasingly dependent on the market for a wage that will allow them to sustain a socially accepted level of consumption (Jessop 2002:160). For young people who are marginalized from the labour force, we can only presume that this will mean increased impoverishment and social exclusion as privatization intensifies?

Of course, one must remember that the ideas driving the economy right now are not new, we have been here before. The hard, cold world of enlightened economic rationality has been around for centuries. Notably, the 19th century classical economist Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) who infamously argued relief given to the poor was interfering with the self-regulating mechanisms of a market economy. In short, Malthus believed human laws that interfere with the market would always be counterproductive as he argued there was a 'scientific law' relating to how the market operated (Dale 2010:55). The arguments of Malthus's and other classical economists, such as, David Ricardo (1772-1823), famous for his 'iron law of wages' theory<sup>8</sup>, persuaded the British Parliament in 1834 to push through the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834). The act curbed the cost of poor relief and thus forced more of the able-bodied poor

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<sup>7</sup> The Health and Social Care Act 2012 according to a number of senior doctors has created an open market in healthcare (see: [www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f1848](http://www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f1848)); the Government is pushing through its agenda of creating more Academy Schools that can attract private sponsorships; and the private security firm G4S entered into a £200m, 10-year contract in 2012 which saw 550 civil servants transfer to the private company.

<sup>8</sup> David Ricardo's "iron law of wages" held that aid given to poor workers under the old Poor Law had the effect of undermining the wages of other workers.

into the infamous workhouses where they were forced (usually under harsh conditions) to work for their basic human needs such as food and shelter.

While the workhouse concept died out in the early to mid-20th century, today to drive the agenda of a low tax<sup>9</sup> ‘pay for what you use’ society the old idea of ‘workfare’ is being mobilized once again. As we know this concept has been around for a long time and despite an unbroken string of failures with this kind of endeavour governments are still trying to force the poor to earn wages in the same labour market that had effectively expelled them prior to workfare (Larry 2007:208). What we are witnessing argues Jessop (2003:2) is a shift from the ‘Keynesian Welfare State’ to the ‘Schumpeterian Workfare State’<sup>10</sup> whose objective it is to match social policy to the needs of labour market flexibility and international competition. In other words, social security policy subordinates to that of the needs of the modern employment market.

We know from history that capital has always had trouble internalizing the costs of social reproduction (the care, for example, of the young and the old, and the costs of social security, education and health care). The Keynesian Welfare State of the post-war period intentionally internalized social costs through either forcing corporation to provide pensions and healthcare, or by indirect progressive taxation. However, the whole period of neoliberalisation has been marked by the continuous attempt by capital to limit such responsibilities (Harvey 2010:265). When capital relinquishes its obligation to the poor, history again would suggest civil unrest is usually not far behind. The summer riots of 2011 are one example of what can happen when part of society is excluded from the fruits of its market economy. Whether we see further social unrest as austerity deepens is unknown. Nevertheless, if we are

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<sup>9</sup> Top rate of tax in the UK stood at 83% in 1979, by 1990 it was 40%, and by 2013 corporation tax stood at just 23%.- HM Revenue & Customs: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/rates/corp.htm> - accessed 15.10.13

<sup>10</sup> See Jessop, Bob (1993) *Towards a Schumpeterian Workfare State? Preliminary Remarks on Post-Fordist Political Economy*

to believe the research carried out by the London School of Economics: - 81% of summer 2011 rioters interviewed said they thought that social unrest would happen again, with 63% stating within the next three years (Lewis 2011:4).

## **1.2 Research Focus**

### **1.2.1 Youth Transition**

The manner in which these macro-economic changes effect the micro environment within which young people live has been a topic which sociologists have constantly grappled with. The continuing intensity of globalization where time and space are no longer the barriers they once were has meant keeping pace with adjustments within youth culture and development has become harder to achieve (Ainley and Allen 2010:9; Nayak 2003:4). This has led to multiple responses by academia. The diversity of disciplines and perspectives across the social sciences has meant that over time a wide range of well-developed traditions within youth research have formed. Broadly speaking, currently, there are considered six known traditions; Development Psychology, Educational Research, Cultural Studies, Youth Transitions Research, Social and Cultural Geography, and Feminist Youth Research and 'Girl Studies' (Hopkins 2010:19). This paper focuses primarily on 'youth transitions' a field of research that emerged after the collapse of the youth labour market in the last two decades of the 20th century (Hopkins 2010:9).

For the last 30 years serious concern about the transition of young people into the labour market has resulted in this tradition becoming one of the strongest bodies of youth research today (Hopkins 2010:9). At first, much of the early work heavily depended upon quantitative methods through the use of large

scale questionnaires, surveys, and various other forms of data analysis which limited the results (see section 2.2.8). In recent years however, a growing number of researchers have been using qualitative methods in the form of interviews, biographies, and detailed ethnographic work, to access the world of young people (Hopkins 2010:9). For instance, in Britain, extensive qualitative work on the damaging effect upon youth transition into the local labour market in post-industrial cities has been well documented by a number of scholars (Holland, 1997; MacDonald, 1999; Johnston, et.al. 2000; MacDonald and Marsh 2001; McDowell, 2002; Nayak, 2003; MacDonald, et.al. 2005; Pemberton, 2007,). Nonetheless, as Nayak (2003:4) puts it “there is a sense that something else is going on where far less is known about how young people are positively adapting to global changes at a local scale.” It is the complexity of this global-local paradigm which continues to make this subject an intriguing field to explore and research.

We have all been young once, and most of us have made a reasonably smooth transition from school to the workforce, albeit, under different circumstances and different periods of time. In some respects it is our own youth experiences that define our own understanding of youth transition. The smooth passage for the baby-boomer generation, and even, my own experience of leaving school in the economic boom period of New Labour's first term (1997-2001), are both completely different from the present situation. While it may be normal for all generations of young people to lack certain status, rights and power in society - the current stereotypes about young people being out of control, or a threat to the moral order of civilized society have only re-emerged since economic restructuring (MacDonald 1997)<sup>11</sup>. This now common stereotype is reinforced through what is known as ‘agents of socialization’ (Hopkins 2010:9). These

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<sup>11</sup> Victorian Britain was plagued with stories of out of control and uncivilized youth roaming the streets of deprived industrial inner cities. The creation of youth centers in the late 19th century followed by many young people drafted/signing up for the First World War eventually saw an end to this behavior on the streets of Britain.

agents are formed in places such as the media and the work place and can have exceptional influence over the belief system of those safely integrated in to the market economy (Hopkins 2010:9).

The subjective comparison of one's own experiences to those of today's youth, allows, arguably, for an open ignorance to form among adults who have made a smooth transition into the workforce (Barry 2005:1). The pessimism towards young people by the media, and in the political and public sphere, has, research suggests, made some young people feel even more socially excluded from society (Barry 2005; MacDonald 1997; Nayak 2003). In the aftermath of the summer riots of 2011 words such as 'feral' and 'nihilistic' teenagers covered the front pages of newspapers. The Prime Minister took to the air to call parts of society as "sick" and argued:

*"For me, the root cause of this mindless selfishness is the same thing I have spoken about for years. It is a complete lack of responsibility in parts of our society, people allowed to feel the world owes them something, that their rights outweigh their responsibilities and their actions do not have consequences." - David Cameron (2011)<sup>12</sup>*

But do young people believe their rights outweigh their responsibilities, or is this just political rhetoric to push through the neoliberal agenda of more personal responsibility by reducing state support? Young people fall in-between the two strong pillars of child and adult. On the one hand young people are often considered as not being independent, mature or as sensible as adults while on the other hand, not being as cute innocent and as vulnerable as younger children (Hopkins 2010:10). This transitional zone between these two pillars is, as Nayak (2003:3) suggests, the enigma we the older generation can only ever approximate in explaining.

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<sup>12</sup> David Cameron's full statement UK riots: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/09/david-cameron-full-statement-uk-riots> - accessed 15.7.13

With this in mind, I began this research proposal with low expectations and many doubts of what I could realistically achieve. Focusing solely on a case study approach in one of Britain's most deprived boroughs (Knowsley), I was unsure if my limited time and resources would produce an adequate amount of data. I was also very concerned that with no previous experience of interviewing young people from deprived backgrounds that the challenge would be too great for an inexperienced researcher. Nevertheless, to my surprise, I was overwhelmed by the willingness, interest, and support I received from the people of Knowsley. And while my restricted time and resources may have limited the results, I hope however, that this research will add some value and understanding to the complexity and difficulty of youth transition in a deprived area of England. Let us now turn to the overall research aims and objectives followed by a brief introduction to the fieldwork.

### **1.2.2 Overall research aim and individual research objectives**

Through the literature review we aim to better understand British historical, structural, and cultural transformations that have occurred over past 80 years. This study then attempts to thread together theoretical understandings of large scale macro-economic change with the results of the qualitative interviews which focused on the micro-politics of youth transition. Much of the research into the problems facing contemporary British society fails to take into account the overarching capitalist system that governs all our lives. I would argue this invisible force is too frequently ignored in the social sciences especially since the decline of Marxism and the rise of Neoliberal hegemony in academia. We will begin therefore by evaluating the profound economic and social theories of the 20th century in an attempt to understand how the situation has arisen whereby the working environment for disadvantaged young people in contemporary Britain is insecure, unstable, and filled with uncertainty. The second part then attempts to understand the implications and consequences this



environment has on young people as they make the transition to the workforce. More specifically we aim to address the following objectives:

1. Based on the literature review examine and evaluate the socio-economic changes that have occurred in Britain over the last 80 years and assess what impact massive economic transformations in the 1980s have had on contemporary youth transition.
2. Based on the empirical study assess and explore the consequences and implications of these socio-economic changes on a diverse sample of young people in one particularly disadvantaged setting.
3. Identify and formulate, using the empirical data, a number of indicative analytical patterns which connect the participants micro environment to the current macro socio-economic landscape.

### **1.2.3 Brief Introduction to the Fieldwork**

The fieldwork took place over a period of 40 days in January and early February 2013 in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley, which is the third most deprived borough in the whole of the UK<sup>13</sup>. To ensure that I could gain access to young people who matched my criteria I visited a regional youth employment fair, several youth training venues, as well as a local business that offered work experience placements and apprenticeships for young people. In total I interviewed 28 young people aged between 16 and 24 all of whom came from either ‘working class’ or what would be considered disadvantaged

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<sup>13</sup> Knowsley MBC Report: [http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/EB26\\_KnowsleyCoreEvidenceBase.pdf](http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/EB26_KnowsleyCoreEvidenceBase.pdf) – accessed 17.9.13

backgrounds. All participants self-classified as 'White British' with the exception of one girl whose family was originally from India.

Around half of the interviews were arranged in advance through a network of adults who had direct interaction with young people (e.g. social workers and managers of local businesses). The other half were interviewed at an employment fair where a large number of young people had gathered to seek out work opportunities. The majority of these participants were randomly selected, which then provided the opportunity for a snow ball sampling technique which led to the inclusion of 4 other young people. All interviews were conducted in a quiet private desk-space with talks lasting from 15 minutes to well over an hour in some cases.

Some participants were NEET's (a young person Not in Education, Employment, or Training), others had full or part-time/temporary jobs, and some were involved in apprenticeship/college training programs or had temporary work experience placements with local companies. None were in higher education although some were considering applying. In addition, through pre-arranged means I met and spoke with key stakeholders including staff from local schools, social workers, youth centre organizers, a Chief Executive of a local business providing training and apprenticeships for young people, and police officers who were directly involved with the development and well-being of young people. Lastly, participant observation was conducted in public spaces, shops, and government institutions (e.g. the local job centre) where young people 'hung-out' or were actively present.

### **1.2.4 Value of Research from an International Prospective**

Before we end this chapter it is important to note that the problems facing young British people are not merely a 'British problem'. The French civil unrest of 2005 and the unexpected Swedish riots of 2013 are two other examples of democratic EU countries, with long traditions of welfare and human rights, all succumbing to large scale social unrest. What these examples and the British riots of 2011 all have in common largely centres around disadvantaged youths expressing their dissatisfaction at the conditions they find themselves in. While France and Sweden's riots featured predominantly first and second generation immigrants, overall it seems that exclusion from employment prospects and wider opportunities within society played a substantial part in the build-up to all three events.

Job insecurity and marginalization has become a major problem for many of Europe's young people. In Greece unemployment among young people is currently 62.5%; Italy 40.5%; Portugal 42.5%; Spain 56.4%; and on average EU unemployment for young people currently stands at 23.5% (Eurostat July 2013<sup>14</sup>). How Europe reached this state of mass youth unemployment is a complex and complicated story. Distinctive unique cultural elements together with globalization, influential and persuasive economic ideas, EU policies, and uneven geographical development have all shaped and moulded these European countries in quite different ways (Harvey 2005, 2010). Although this thesis will focus solely on Britain's story and the macro transformations that have occurred over time it is hoped however, that the results may provide some parallels with other EU countries facing the growing problems of youth social exclusion and unemployment.

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<sup>14</sup> Euro Stat News Release: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-30082013-AP/EN/3-30082013-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-30082013-AP/EN/3-30082013-AP-EN.PDF) - accessed 17.8.13

### **1.2.5 Outline of Chapters**

Section 2 is split into three segments. The first part evaluates the social, political and economic transformation in Britain from 1930-1990 with specific focus on Margret Thatcher's 11 year premiership who is notably considered the most influential British Prime Minister since the war. The second segment analysis the sociological theories that formed in the 1990s and the policies that subsequently followed in an attempt to understand and tackle the employment problems which economic restructuring produced. The last segment explains how the theories and policies of the 1990s and early 2000's were manifested in practice by reviewing a number of ethnographic research papers on disadvantaged young people from an area of England which felt the full impact of economic restructuring and deindustrialization.

In section 3 we explain the challenges and problems of conducting research on young people which is followed by a description of the methodology undertaken and the reasons particular research methods were selected. Lastly, section 3 explains the history of, and problems which face the borough of Knowsley to provide the reader with a better understanding of the issues faced by local young people in their transition. Section 4 and 5 look at five specific cameos of youth transition drawn from a sample of 28 in Knowsley. From these cameos a number of indicative analytical patterns are explored to highlight the common problems and issues many young people face in a deprived and socially disadvantaged area such as Knowlsey. Section 6 ends the study with some concluding remarks about the UK and disadvantaged young people.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social, Political, and Economic Transformations in Britain: 1930 – 1990**

#### **2.1.1 It's All Thatcher's Fault...Right?**

It has become a cliché to blame Britain's current levels of poverty and inequality solely on Margret Thatcher and her 11 years in power (1979-1990). Certainly, it is true, that Thatcher's economic and social policies resulted in a trebling of the proportion of people living in low-income households (from 8% to 25%), while at the same time child poverty also increased dramatically with the number of children in households below half average income rising from 1.4 million to 4.4 million (Pantazis, et.al. 2006:4). Nonetheless, one must ask the question how did Thatcher manage to win three consecutive elections while allowing poverty to rise so dramatically? Clearly, no politician could win a single election, never-mind three, by openly promising to drastically increase inequality in society. Therefore, to try and answer this question we have to understand the power of economic ideas that have governed Britain since the rise of the capitalist system.

Since the beginning of capitalism there have been cycles in the market's relationship with society and vice-versa. For instance, as we mentioned in the introduction new ideas towards how markets function began to emerge near the end of the eighteenth century. This led to the state reducing its involvement in the market - most notoriously highlighted by the New Poor Law of 1834 which marked symbolically the triumph of the market turning labour into a mere commodity within it (Maunck 2005:148). Of course, the

latter half of the nineteenth century saw problems emerge for this self-regulating market; eventually culminating in the Wall Street collapse of 1929, the Great Depression, and subsequently the rise of fascism and the Second World War. Since the war we have lived under two different economic systems and ideologies. In short, the first period (1945 - 1978) saw social re-embedding of the market, where the state activity controlled and regulated the market. The second period (1979 - present) has seen the dis-embedding of the market prevail, in other words, overtime the market has come to regulate more and more of human activity leaving much of the population at the control of market forces (Maunck 2005:148).

With this in mind, if we are to truly understand the UK's social and economic problems which are currently, directly and indirectly, effecting young people's transition into the workforce and adulthood - it is undeniably important to first evaluate the 20th century's profound, social, political, and economic changes that have occurred in Britain. In doing so we lay the foundation to understanding the political discourse and social economic theories that surround the plight of youth transition and social exclusion in Britain today.

### **2.1.2 The Paradigm Shift**

The 1930s were an extremely difficult time for the working class in Britain. The Great Depression or as it was known in Britain: The Great Slump, was a period of national economic downturn that had its origins in the United States following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. The aftershock of the stock market crash meant credit dried up in the United States which by then had become the world's largest economic centre. This inevitably had a huge knock on effect for the world economy. By the time the 1930s had arrived world trade had contracted, market prices had fallen, and governments around the world had

resorted to emergency measures, such as erecting trade barriers and tariffs which only worsened the situation by further hindering global trade.

Particularly hardest hit in Britain were the heavy industrial and mining areas in the North of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, as they depended greatly on demand from overseas. Indeed, as demand for British products collapsed, unemployment 'officially' more than doubled from 1 million to 2.5 million (20% of the workforce). To make matters worse much of British Industry in the Northern towns was considered outdated and economically inefficient. Thus, when global prices fell these Northern industrial towns found it difficult to compete on the global market leaving some towns with up to 70% of its workforce unemployed. The town of Jarrow in the North East of England is a good example of this where unemployed workers famously marched 300 miles to London to protest against mass unemployment.

In his now classic book 'The Road to Wigan Pier', George Orwell gives the reader an insight in to the terrible conditions life was like for the unemployed working class living in Northern England. As Orwell (1989:78 original 1937) predicted so well, "We may as well face the facts that several million men in England will - unless another war breaks out - never have a real job this side [of] the grave." Two years after the publication of Orwell's book the Second World War broke out in Europe leading to (in economic terms) full employment in Britain as the workforce was mobilized for the war effort. Nevertheless, it was not just full employment in the early 1940s that brought change to Britain. It was also the measures taken to counteract fascism that had seemed to spread so easily across mainland Europe under the economic deprivations of the 1930s.

By the early 1940s one could argue that the threat of fascism brought about a shift in Anglo-American political ideology as the war in Europe intensified. In the United States the 1941 State of the Union address by President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed four fundamental freedoms that should be considered universal: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. A year later on the other side of the Atlantic the Beveridge Report (1942) was published in Britain. In similar fashion to Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" the Beveridge Report (1942) identified what it considered the "Five Giant Evils" in society: squalor (misery of abject poverty), ignorance (uneducated), want (lacking basic human needs such as shelter, clothing, and food), idleness (unemployment), and disease (inadequate healthcare). Beveridge's revolutionary proposals later became the foundation for the construction of what is known today as the modern welfare state, but perhaps more importantly, a change in the political, economic, and social consensus in Britain for the next 30 years which is commonly referred to as the Post-War Consensus.

### **2.1.3 The Post-War Consensus**

In a nutshell, the Post-War Consensus was built around the Beveridge report recommendations and Keynesian economic ideas of direct government intervention to stimulate the economy in times of poor economic growth<sup>15</sup>. The main role of the state therefore was to focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens. This involved, to name but a few, the creations of the National Health Service (1948), the Family Allowances Act (1945), Introduction of Basic State Pension (1948) and the nationalization of

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<sup>15</sup> Keynesian economics counteracted the classical school that had dominated economic thought throughout the early parts of the 20th century and most of the 19th century. For classical economists any sort of government intervention was likely to be harmful, believing the self-regulating 'laissez-faire' attitude was 'scientific' and thus transactions between private parties should be free from outside influence as long as they confine within the laws set out.



essential industries such as gas, electricity, coal, and rail. As Kavanagh (1987:76) explains, “There was a belief that government could play a positive role in promoting greater equality through social engineering”. This included implementing certain policies such as progressive taxation, redistribution welfare spending and comprehensive schooling.

Clearly after the most destructive war in history the rawest forms of capitalism and communism were not fit for a peaceful world. The only seeable alternative argued distinguished social scientists, Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom in their 1953 publication, ‘Politics, Economics & Welfare’, was to balance and regulate, state, market, and democratic institutions to assure social inclusion, well-being, economic stability, and most importantly, peace among the powerful nations (Havey 2005:10). The 19th century faith of individualism and a self-help society disappeared as the new trend towards collective bargaining, progressive taxation, government economic planning, and social services based on need not ability to pay became the new consensus.

The long post-war boom from 1945 to the early 1970s which brought about record rates of growth in OECD nations is broadly accepted to have been built around a certain set of labour control practices (organized trade unions with bargaining powers for workers), technological advancement (the Second World War spurred on massive technological development which was later adapted to the market place), consumption habits (the birth of ‘suburbanization’ that radically transformed lifestyles bringing about the motorway and the automobile), and as already mentioned the political and economic shift in consensus which we can refer to as the Beveridge-Keynesian model (Harvey 1989:124). While undoubtedly this period had its fair share of social and economic problems, on the whole historians consider this era to be the ‘Golden Age’ as social equality was high, unemployment low, and the

average worker had the greatest share of prosperity and stability. The collapse or disbandment of this model and the rise again of liberal economic theory came about through the economic stagnation period of the 1970s.

#### **2.1.4 The British Disease<sup>16</sup>**

The economic crisis that arose in the 1970s was the first of its kind in Britain since the ‘Great Slump’ of the 1930s. Certainly, how the crisis of the 1970s came about is no simple story and there are many factors that go beyond the scope of this paper. However, in short, the loss of the British Empire through decolonization, lack of industrial investment, and poor productivity, had seen the country slowly decline in the world economic league table. Britain, who had once ranked ninth in the world in terms of GDP per capita, had, by the start of the 1970s, fallen to fifteenth and then slumped even further to eighteenth midway through the decade (Cairncross 1992:338). If anything, the 1970s was a period when the relative weakness and decline of the British economy became increasingly unsupportable and thus brought about growing political and social tensions (Oakland 2001:8).

To support the economic decline from the mid-1960s to 1973 Britain participated in loose monetary policies which eventually lead to rising inflation (reaching 26% in 1975). The sharp world recession of 1973 brought about by the Arab oil embargo was seen as the beginning of a turbulent time in the world economy which badly effected inflation stricken Britain. On the domestic front, the downturn in the global economy did not prevent the country’s strong union power from demanding that wages keep pace with inflation, and thus this lead to confrontation (industrial strike action) with the

UK government in 1972 and 1974. On both occasions the unions won - it was clear the public sympathized with the workers and therefore the treasury unwillingly had to fork out more on wages to already unproductive publicly owned industries.

As one might expect, fiscal difficulties mounted for the state as soaring inflation, a stagnated economy, and rising unemployment all created a huge budget deficit. With the economy in such a mess, the world's financial markets began to question the true value of the British pound leading in 1976 to a rapid sale of Sterling which put Britain on the verge of bankruptcy. To prop up the Pound and the British economy the IMF stepped in with a £2.3 billion loan (the largest ever at that time). However, the IMF deal came at a cost with a change in policy orientating away from full employment and social welfare towards the strict control of inflation and public spending.

Of course, implementing such measures was no easy task as British trade union power was at its peak by the late 1970s. For example, when the Labour government in 1978 sought to hold a pay freeze to control inflation this led to more widespread strikes and civil unrest commonly referred to as the 'Winter of Discontent'. At this point the country became seemingly ungovernable; economically, socially, and politically. All of which marked the end for the post war consensus and allowed an old school of thought to dust off its

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<sup>16</sup> The "British Disease" refers to the low industrial productivity and frequent labor strife's that plagued Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s.

nineteenth century rhetoric and win over right wing politicians and influential people on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **2.1.5 Economic Restructuring of the 1980s**

*“Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul” - Margret Thatcher (1981)*

Margret Thatcher came to power in 1979 on a mandate to reverse the UK's economy which had been in decline since the end of the First World War. Thatcher argued the so-called 'nanny-state' i.e. too much government intervention was breeding a culture of dependency and undermining freedom of choice in the marketplace (Leach 2009). With the help of influential economists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman the doctrine of balanced government budgets, individual personal responsibility through limited state support, and the promotion of a 'laissez faire environment'<sup>17</sup> became part of Thatcher's political ideology<sup>18</sup>.

Under this new doctrine controlling inflation at the expense of full employment was and still is considered by many states as essential for the stability of the capitalist system. Therefore, to tame inflation Thatcher set about using economist Milton Friedman's monetarism theory. Friedman argued inflation was a printing press phenomenon, and thus, by increasing interest rates this would reduce the amount of money in circulation and thus reduce inflation. Of course, raising interest rates also lead to the sterling value appreciating which consequently damaged the manufacturing export sector - seeing over two million jobs losses between 1979-81. Nevertheless, the post war consensus of keeping unemployment low was no longer on the

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<sup>17</sup> An environment in which transactions between private parties are free from government intervention.

<sup>18</sup> Notably this later emerged as part of Neo-liberal theory the heir to liberalism, the dominant economic doctrine of the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century (Chang 2003:3).

government's agenda. Thatcher was a strong believer that labour had to be disciplined through market forces. The layoff of workers from inefficient and underproductive public owned industries was essential for the restructuring of the economy and to catch up to the productivity levels of other advanced capitalist countries.

Alan Budd, an economic adviser to Thatcher later publicly admitted in an interview with the Observer newspaper that he felt the fight against inflation in the early 1980s was a cover to raise unemployment and reduce the strength of union and working class cooperation and power. Budd continued to explain, shedding labour was also seen as a way to prepare state run companies for privatization by improving their efficiency and cost structures (Davis 2000:30). Whether this is true or not, by 1983 the productivity turnaround from reducing labour had not worked as 'officially' planned, manufacturing was down 30% from 1978 and balance of payments in manufactured goods was in deficit (Wilks 1997). The Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1983, Nigel Lawson, told the House of Lords Select Committee on Overseas Trade:

*"There is no adamant law that says we have to produce as much in the way of manufactures as we consume. If it does turn out that we are relatively more efficient in world terms at providing services than at producing goods, then our national interest lies in a surplus on services and a deficit on goods"*  
(Wilks 1997:693)

This fundamental change in policy of moving away from manufacturing towards the promotion of a service based economy (known as the deindustrialization of Britain) is an essential part of the British economy and society today. Indeed this shift from manufacturing to service brought about the transfer from 'Fordism'<sup>19</sup> style employment to what is commonly referred

to as 'flexible accumulation' or 'Post-Fordism'. This involved a change-over from mass production depending on economies of scale to production based rather on economies of scope, a term which refers to the capacity to adapt rapidly and to respond flexibly to diverse and rapidly changing markets (Allen & Thomas 2000:332). In Britain between 1981-85 'flexible workers' increased by 16 per cent to 8.1 million while permanent jobs decreased by 6 percent to 15.6 million (Financial Times, 27 February 1987, cited in Harvey 1989:152).

### **2.1.6 Disciplining Trade Union Power and Privatizing the Economy**

To bring about this change of widespread economic restructuring that over time has led to exacerbated labour insecurities within the economy, trade union power that had been so influential in the 1970s, would have to be severely disciplined. In 1981 Thatcher tried to tame the unions by announcing sweeping pit closures only to withdraw and succumb to union power when a wave of strikes swept the coal mines. However, high interest rates between 1979-84 meant unemployment averaged over 10% and thus saw trade union power lose 17% of its membership over that 5 year period (Harvey 2005:59).

By 1984 Thatcher felt the time was right to take on the unions and therefore announced the UK would start importing cheaper foreign coal. Pit closures were declared and this provoked the miner's strike of 1984 which lasted for almost a year and while in the early days had much public support by the time

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<sup>19</sup> A manufacturing system designed to spew out standardized, low-cost goods and afford its workers decent enough wages to buy them

Thatcher defeated them the mood of the country had changed. With less sympathy and support for unions Thatcher further reduced their power by opening the UK's economy to foreign competition and investment. For example Sheffield's steel industry and Glasgow's shipbuilding industry both disappeared within a few years and with them union power.

The final dismantlement of union power came with the rapid privatization of state-owned companies. This doctrine based on the premise of market forces argued privatization would make companies more efficient and productive, and allow competition to flourish, thus making the British economy more competitive on the global stage. At the same time shifting the ownership onto businessmen allowed the government to relinquish moral obligations while boosting the public treasury in the short term. During Thatcher's second term she sold off Jaguar, British Telecom, British Aerospace, Britoil, and British Gas, and after she won a third term, British Airways, British Petroleum, Rolls Royce, British steel, and all major utilities such as water and electricity were also privatized.

The 1980s privatization experiment in the UK was the largest public divestiture ever undertaken among capitalist economies (Florio 2004:341). Whether you argue for or against privatization what is considered beyond dispute is that the net beneficiaries were mainly from the wealthiest 10-20% of the population. They were provided with the opportunity to purchase under-priced shares from the exchequer, thus allowing additional capital incomes from monopoly profits for several years, and benefited from discounts on capital income taxes. In addition, directors and managers saw the ratio between their wage and an average worker increase while associated benefits and bonuses further added to the ratio increase. At the other end of the scale the poorest 10-20 percent of the population bore the net welfare costs to this

economic experiment. Essential public services that once had fixed charges began to increase year on year. Moreover, many lost their jobs and others faced greater job insecurity as decreased labour costs benefited short term share prices and company profits (Florio 2004:363). Overall this added to social deprivation and the dramatic rise in poverty and inequality.

### **2.1.7 Popular Capitalism, Financial Deregulation, and the Construction of Middle Class Consent**

The legitimacy for Thatcher to introduce this massive wave of privatization came through her aim to re-engineer the electorate along the lines of what she called “popular capitalism”. Before Thatcher’s premiership only a small elite of around 3 million people owned shares in the UK. Privatization promoted the public to buy shares in newly privatized companies such as British Gas and British Telecom. By the end of the 1980s around 12 million people owned shares and that would rise further with the demutualization of the building societies in the 1990s (Simon 2013). In addition to share ownership, she also promoted tenants to buy their council houses. In doing so this vastly increased the number of homeowners in 10 years and satisfied the old working class dream of owning a house. The by-product of this was that a speculative housing bubble began that benefited the property owning class as they saw their asset values rise until the property crash of the early 1990s (Harvey 2005:61). Those who chose not to or could not afford to buy their council house missed out on the credit fuelled speculative gains that saw house prices reach a peak in 2008.

To maintain the City of London’s status as one of the world’s biggest financial centres the British government deregulated the famous square mile in October 1986. The ‘Big Bang’ as it was called created an increase in market activity which played a significant role in changing the British economy and widening



the inequality gap. As old industries were destroyed (as mentioned before) in places like Glasgow and Sheffield, to compensate new so-called ‘knowledge economies’ of finance and business services emerged, disproportionately concentrated in London and the south east (Butler & Watt 2007:67). Sometimes referred to as the ‘financialization’ of the economy, by 2011 financial and insurance services contributed £125.4 billion in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy, 9.4% of the UK’s total GVA. The London region alone contributed 45.8% of the total Financial and Insurance sector (Maer & Broughton 2012:1). In a speech in 2010 the Executive Director of Financial Stability at the Bank of England, Andrew Haldane, pointed out:

*“The period from the early 1970s up until 2007 marked another watershed. Financial liberalization took hold in successive waves. Since then, finance has comfortably outpaced growth in the non-financial economy, by around 1.5 percentage points per year. If anything, this trend accelerated from the early 1980s onwards. Measured real value added of the financial intermediation sector more than trebled between 1980 and 2008, while whole economy output doubled over the same period.”<sup>20</sup>*

The growth of the financial sector has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping the British economy since the 1980s. Thatcher saw the emergence of these new finance and business services as liberating the old class structures that were embedded in British Society. Speaking after the liberalization of the City of London in 1986 Thatcher said:

*“The [London] city’s growing confidence and drive owes a good deal to young people, its vast new dealing rooms are run by the young, people who made it not for who they know or what school tie they wear, but on sheer merit, that is the kind of society I want to see.”<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> The Bank of England (2010) Andrew Haldane Speech:

<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/speeches/2010/speech442.pdf> - accessed 7.8.13

<sup>21</sup> Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet 10. Nov 1986: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106512> - accessed 12.10.13

It seems clear here, Thatcher, who had come from a humble background herself as the daughter of a greengrocer felt the British class system was hindering the country's future prospects. Before the 'Big Bang' the London Stock Exchange like many of Britain's established institutions was considered a "cosy gentlemen club" that was run and controlled by the established elite in society. Your class, pre-economic restructuring, in essence, defined what job you could get to a certain degree. Thatcher wanted to make Britain more entrepreneurial, and innovative, and inspire a new generation to vitalize the country's new emerging economy. This offered the possibilities of exciting alternatives for some in the lower classes but at the cost of removing the comfort blanket provided by social class membership (Butler and Watt 2007:187). A famous example of this is Nick Leeson, the son of a plasterer from a Watford working class council estate who thanks to Thatcher's new policies and with 'sheer merit', climbed the career ladder with the once esteemed Barings Bank (before he went on to make a number of unauthorized speculative trades which caused the world's oldest merchant bank to collapse in 1995).

Of course there is another side to the financial deregulation that took place in the mid-1980s. The Geographer David Harvey (1989:332/335) in his opus "The Conditions of Post Modernity" points out:

*"The emergence of this 'casino economy' with all its financial speculation and fictitious capital formation (much of it unbacked by any growth in real production) provided abundant opportunities for personal aggrandizement. On the back of this boom, a whole new yuppie culture formed, with its accoutrements of gentrification, close attention to symbolic capital, fashion, design and quality of urban life." Harvey continues to add: "The voices of the homeless sadly went unheard in a world cluttered with illusion, fantasy and pretense".*

Harvey is arguing here that Britain in essence got 'drunk' on unregulated 'easy' credit that had been pumped into the economy by the creation of more complex financial instruments. Undoubtedly, this played a big role in creating the economic boom of the mid 1980s that later turned into the bust and recession of the early 1990s. In the process, this empowered a few people to accumulate large sums of money in a short space of time, thus allowing a new culture of extreme wealth and superficial lifestyles to form that found itself abstracted from normal society. As one part of society became richer sympathy for those at the bottom weakened. Miller (1995:8) calls this a 'democratic deficit' in which the two-thirds living in relative affluence with a secure political control have no need to pay regard to the one-third who are increasingly becoming impoverished within society.

For instance, in 1988 Thatcher declined the idea that there should be any public response to the growing number of homeless young people whose social security (Income Support) entitlement had been withdrawn in exchange for a youth training 'guarantee' - which later was revealed to be significantly unfulfilled (Barry 2005:4). That same year Mother Teresa spoke about the "pain" she felt after visiting some of London's homeless, saying she found it "very difficult to understand why there are so many in a country of such wealth".<sup>22</sup> Fundamentally, the growing numbers of homeless were as Tony Benn (a Labour MP) argued victims of Thatcher's irrefutable belief in market forces.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mother Teresa homeless plea to Mother Thatcher: <http://archive.catholicherald.co.uk/article/22nd-april-1988/3/mother-teresas-homeless-plea-to-mother-thatcher> - accessed 7.6.13

<sup>23</sup> UK Parliament Debate 22.11.1990: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199091/cmhansrd/1990-11-22/Debate-6.html> - accessed 22.10.13

Conceivably, it appears that as some people prospered under this new economy, others were left or casted outside the market system creating a reservoir of apparently disposable people bereft of social protection and supportive social structures. As the country became polarized between the 'haves' and the 'have not's' poverty and inequality rose at record levels. The legitimacy and consensus for this came from a growing belief among right-wing commentators such as Barry (1990) cited in Shephard (2003), he argued that, wealth and inequality are necessary for the effective working of a market economy. In other words inequality is a fundamental precondition of the economic success from which everyone benefits (a rising tide lifts all boats). Since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s this idea has developed over time in to a core belief among orthodox economists and in many respects is the polar opposite to that of the post war consensus (Chang 2003:2).

### **2.1.8 The Aftermath of Thatcher(ism)**

*"When we look back on the 1980s we will see many victims of market forces"<sup>23</sup> - Tony Benn Labour MP*

Before we continue, this is perhaps a good time to pause for a moment to summarize what has been addressed so far. It is commonly known that capitalism as a system has numerous contradictions and thus is prone to crises. During the early years of the 1930s depression social scientists discovered that the overall feeling among the population suggested that unemployment was a disaster which happened to them as individuals and for which they only had themselves to blame (Roberts. et.al 1984:238). However, as conditions deteriorated the blame shifted from the individual on to the state which manifested in to major consequences for peace and stability in Europe. After the bloodiest war in history the creation of the modern welfare state in 1945 erected a firewall between the unpredictability of an irrational economic system subject to periods of booms and busts, and those who would feel the

impact hardest - the poor and working class communities. One could argue it was understood that by guaranteeing a basic standard of living for all, then the risk of widespread social unrest and the possible overthrow of the capitalist economic system would be reduced (Painter and Jeffrey 2009:46). This meant the post war consensus period became a time when the individual was considered a victim of unemployment and thus it was deemed morally just for the state to provide assistance to prevent a level of destitution occurring.

Nevertheless, the long post-war boom eventually manifested itself in to a crisis of profitability by the late 1970s (Massey and Allen 1988). Once again contradictions within capital accumulation, exaggerated further by poor management of the macro economy, coupled with strong trade union demands for its members, and combined with the overarching irreversible decline of British influence and power in the world, had again put the economic system up for question. For Thatcher and her ideological allies, to solve this problem there was, as she famously remarked 'no alternative' to her neo-liberal reforms that saw the workings of state, capital, and labour change once more and despite much struggle by the working classes, eventually became the new consensus that has governed political and economic discourse up to the present day.

Fundamentally, what we saw in the 1980s was the shift back towards blaming the individual not the system for the conditions people found themselves in. Using economics as the method Thatcher cured what she considered the 'British disease' taking the power away from what some believed were 'greedy' collective unions and back into the hands of the 'responsible' capitalist class. The neo-liberal reforms, although slow to take off, eventually

began to win the battle of ideas which lead to hegemony<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, appealing to our intuitions, instincts, values and desires, new opportunities emerged for a once considered class stricken nation. These included access for the low classes to new ‘white collar’ job opportunities, and incentives, such as, increased access to asset and credit purchases (stocks, shares, credit cards, mortgages) which allowed for wealth accumulation, homeownership, and individual materialistic lifestyles to flourish among a certain part of society. The collective values that had been quite strong in the post war period were swept aside by the legitimacy of an ethos of competitive individualism (Allen and Thomas 2010:338).

Evidently, ‘Popular Capitalism’ convinced the middle and ‘aspiring’ working classes that this new economy was not only going to benefit the already wealthy but it was also good for them too. In doing so the capitalist class gained access to privatizing the production of state held assets which certainly brought about a dramatic rise in levels of poverty and inequality as the surplus of these once state owned institutions, much of them located in prime real estate locations, fell into private hands<sup>25</sup>. It appears, wealth distribution on neo-liberal grounds projects a particular distorted form of meritocracy as the core element to a modern democratic society. This is what Harvey (2005) refers to as ‘accumulation by dispossession’<sup>26</sup>. All of which meant between 1979 and 1996 (Conservative rule), the incomes of the richest tenth of the

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<sup>24</sup> In using ‘Hegemony’ we are referring to the shaping of the consent of the masses to the direction of social and economic life as controlled by the ruling class.

<sup>25</sup> The best study of UK privatization concluded the deliberately low price at which long standing public assets were sold to the private sector resulted in a net transfer of £14 billion from taxpayers to private investors. With a further £3 billion in fees to the banks who arranged the transfers. Thus the government in effect paid the private sector some £17 billion to facilitate the sale of publicly own assets. (Florio 2004)

<sup>26</sup> Harvey (2005) argues the neoliberal capitalist policies in many western nations, from the 1970s up to the present day have resulted in a centralization of wealth and power in the hands of the few by dispossessing the public of their wealth or land. These neoliberal policies are guided mainly by four practices: privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions.

population grew by 68% after allowing for inflation and housing costs, while those of the poorest fell by 12% (Gordon, 2000 cited in Pantazis, et.al 2006:4). Furthermore, the total share of national income of the bottom 10% dropped from 4% to 2%, while the share of the top 10% rose from 21% to 28%, making Britain more unequal than at any time in recent history (Pantazis, et.al 2006:4).

When Thatcher left office in 1990 after eleven years in power undoubtedly she changed the ‘heart and soul’ of the country through her economic restructuring. Thatcher’s successor John Major perhaps showed how much the political discourse had changed in the country when he referred to the homeless, in the run up to the 1992 general election, as people who sleep rough because they want to, and in 1994 beggars are described as an eyesore which should be dealt with by the law. Homelessness as MacDonald (1997:98) argues is reconstructed as a problem for those who have to witness it not bare it. This perhaps fits with the common belief among psychologists who claim that social relations in a society are built on material foundations. High levels of income inequality have a powerful effect on how we relate and empathize with each other. The post-war liberal assumptions about poverty no longer dominated political discourse as the rise in neo-liberal ideology allowed the ‘radical right’ views to take center stage (Kasarda:1989:161).

## **2.2 Young People: Sociological Theories and Political Policies in Post-Industrial Britain**

### **2.2.1 The Underclass Story**

By the late 1980s and early 1990s an idea began to take hold that argued Britain was witnessing the rise of an underclass of people at the bottom of the social ladder, who were structurally and culturally distinct from traditional norms of decent working-class life (MacDonald 1997:1). The underclass to some was an emerging breed of young people who lacked work ethics, choosing instead to depend on welfare hand-outs or illegal activities to get by. Lacking in morals and ethics, a pastime for them involved participating in anti-social behaviour, which threatened the law-abiding civilized majority and shook the ordered stability of a wider society (MacDonald 1997:2).

It seems before the 1980s the term underclass was only used to describe the position of some workers from ethnic minority groups (Kasarda 1989: 160). The ‘race riots’ in the early 1980s involving mainly black youths in place like Toxteth Liverpool (1981), St Paul’s Bristol (1980), Moss Side Manchester (1981) and Brixton London (1985), further stamped the underclass identity to a non-white minority whom to many commentators just struggled to fit into the British way of life (Nayak 2003:171). However, by the late 1980s scholars such as Frank Field a Labour MP for Birkenhead published a book titled “Losing Out: The Emergence of Britain's Underclass” (1989), and a year later American author and influential policy adviser, Charles Murray, was invited over to England at the behest of the Sunday Times to write his thesis: “The Emerging British Underclass” (1990), that was followed up by “Underclass:



The Crisis Deepens” (1994)<sup>27</sup>. Although the two authors took different positions on how the underclass had formed, both came to the agreement that it was a problem that stretched beyond certain ethnic groups.

As the underclass debate pick up pace in the 1990s the president of the British Sociological Association, John Westergaard (1992), argued there were four basic positions around the controversial subject. Firstly, and perhaps the most well-known and eagerly used by the media and politicians, is an approach referred to as the culturalist, individualist or behavioral perspective that Westergaard (1992) titled the ‘moral turpitude’ thesis. Principally, it argues the individual is in-charge of their own life and thus they are culpable for the level of poverty that they and their family find themselves in. The ‘cradle to grave’ welfare state has given human agents negative incentives that undermine their natural responsibilities, fostering a work-shy mentality, which subsequently breeds idleness and fecklessness, thus making them over-dependent on the States social safety net (Crowther 2000:153).

To solve this social problem the State must make citizens take greater responsibility of their own well-being. This is done by removing state support which is deemed unproductive in the long run. For example, it is argued by providing housing benefits for school leavers, this can result in, if they choose, a bypass of responsibility that is normally instilled through work, and thus instead live off government support. The argument stresses, that by forcing young people to find work and to look after themselves it will reinstall the sense of autonomous self-government to the individual and the family they may provide for. Charles Murray’s British Underclass thesis (1990, 1994) and

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<sup>27</sup> Both of Murray’s underclass papers (1990, 1994) were later published by the Institute of Economic Affairs a highly influential right wing think tank.

his earlier work on the American underclass called 'Losing Ground' (1984) is arguably the pioneer of this perspective.

The second approach which fits with Frank Field's (1989) thesis, agrees that an underclass has emerged within society but indicates social structural factors are to blame rather than cultural ones. This is the classic polarity within the field of social science between structuralist and behaviouralist approaches (MacDonald 1997:6). This approach which follows a similar position set out in this thesis thus far, argues the emergence of the underclass has come about through the restructuring of the labour market where a minority have become economically redundant. This absence of legitimate employment tied in with reductions of state support, while further exacerbated by growing social inequality, poverty, and exclusion, all mix together to produce an underclass trapped at the very bottom of the social ladder (Crowther 2000:151).

Approach number three takes the classic 'agnostic' position. It does not deny that theoretically an underclass may very well exist, especially with the profound socio-economic changes occurring over recent decades. Nevertheless, the term is considered derogatory in meaning and without solid empirical evidence should be critically questioned within academia. Lastly, we have the approach which rejects the concept all together, suggesting the term is politically dangerous and unsupported both theoretically and empirically. The underclass term is therefore used as a political 'trump card' to push through reform policies that otherwise would be considered unfair on the poor. This 'red herring' intentionally misleads the public's understanding and opinions towards the cause of poverty and the problems faced by those stuck in it (Kasarda 1989). While each position has valid points it is the first two perspectives – culturalist and structuralist that have shaped the political debates and policies since the 1980s. This paper will therefore evaluate both

perspectives in more detail to assess the theoretical value they bring to understanding youth development and poverty in Britain.

### **2.2.2 The Undeserving Poor: The Culturalist Perspective**

Murray's well-structured argument on the underclass found an eager audience with Republicans and Conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1980s and 1990s as it brought a convincing legitimacy to the new neo-liberal consensus of welfare reform (Crowther 2000:152). When the US Democrats and British Labour parties gained power in the 1990s they too embraced the idea, pushing through in the US, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996), which was geared as Bill Clinton remarked "to end welfare as we have come to know it". And in the UK, a welfare reform program called 'The New Deal' (1997) that aimed at getting people back in to work and off benefits, "a hand up not a hand out" became the slogan (MacDonald 1997:7).

Today, unsurprisingly, Murray's and other 'radical right' views are perhaps even more dominant under the UK's present economic austerity program. For example in trying to justify cuts to welfare George Osborne (present British Chancellor of the Exchequer) in 2012 remarked:

*"Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next-door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits."*<sup>28</sup>

By using a fictitious scenario Osborne is trying to foment a division between the working poor, i.e. the shift worker and the unemployed i.e. the considered

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<sup>28</sup> George Osbornes full speech Conservative Conference 2012:  
<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/politics/2012/10/george-osbornes-speech-conservative-conference-full-text>  
- accessed 14.5.13

‘lazy benefit dependent scrounger’. The narrative of dividing the poor in to two simple but very different groups is exactly how Murray (1990) begins the construction of his argument:

*“I was taught by my middle-class parents that there were two kinds of poor people. One class of poor people was never even called ‘poor’. I came to understand that they simply lived with low incomes, as my own parents had done when they were young. Then there was another set of poor people, just a handful of them. These people didn’t lack just money. They were defined by their behavior. Their homes were littered and unkempt. The men in the family were unable to hold a job for more than a few weeks at a time. Drunkenness was common. The children grew up ill-schooled and ill-behaved and contributed a disproportionate share of the local juvenile delinquents.” Murray (1990:24)*

Murray paints a simple, conservative picture, easy for middle class ‘values’ to identify with, that puts the poor into the category of either deserving or undeserving. We see the underclass are in essence the undeserving poor. Throughout the post-war years (1946 - 1979), Murray (1990) argues, the distinction between ‘honest’ and ‘dishonest’ poor had been weakened. He stresses, too much sympathy was given to the ‘undeserving’ poor based around Oscar Lewis’s social theory coined the ‘culture of poverty’ (Murray 1990:25). The policies of Thatcher in the 1980s, notably the increase in social and economic inequality, hardly enter in to the underclass equation for Murray. Instead, a too generous welfare state has served to deplete the work ethic, enterprise and self-reliance that once signaled the British working class (Green 1992). According to Murray (1990), there are three key components: unemployment, crime, and illegitimacy/single motherhood, which all bind together to form the cultural reproduction of the underclass.

Unemployment in Murray’s eyes fits with the neo-liberal belief that indicates it is always voluntary. The argument suggests labour often has a certain price

which below it people prefer not to work (Harvey 2005:53). Unemployment arises because generous state benefits seem a better option than low paid work. Murray (1990) particularly emphasizes this point with respect to young people, who after leaving school can all too easily bypass the responsibility of legitimate work. Understandably, under a capitalist system work is considered central to life. Young people who remain out of the work force at this crucial point in their development, i.e. the transition from teenager to adult, miss out on acquiring important skills, networks of friends, and experiences that enable them to establish a place in society (Murray 1990:42). Thus, the welfare reforms mentioned earlier by the US Democratic and British Labour parties in the 1990s were, according to Murray and neo-liberal theory, a crucial step towards reducing unemployment and helping young people become responsible citizens (Harvey 2005:53).

An over-generous welfare state also encourages problems for young females. Previously having an 'illegitimate baby was understood to be brutally punishing if you were poor. Nevertheless, the rise of welfare support for mothers means young women who give birth to a child receive first priority on social housing, and comfortable long-term state benefits. This leads Murray (1990) to suggest single parenthood has become economically rational. The consequences of this indicate young fathers need no longer support the mother. So instead of working in legitimate low status employment to support the family; the dole, black-market activities, benefit fraud, and crime become far more appealing to young males whose responsibility as a father has been weakened by the state.

Children who then grow up without a father figure are according to Murray (1990:33) associated with a level of “physical unruliness”. Drawing on connections between reports on child behaviour from poor inner city neighborhoods in the US and UK, Murray (1990:33) summaries that:

*“In communities without fathers, the kids tend to run wild. The fewer the fathers, the greater the tendency. Run wild can mean such simple things as young children having no set bedtime. It can mean their being left alone in the house at night while mummy goes out. It can mean an 18 month old toddler allowed to play in the street. And...it can mean children who are inordinately physical and aggressive in their relationships with other children.”*

For Murray this creates a vicious cycle as these children are more likely in the future to also become single parents with poor parenting and social skills.

In terms of crime, Murray (1990:36) uses statistics from the UK government to point out, for example, that the violent crime rate in England from 1982 to 1986 rose by 43 per cent. He also suggests people in England were twice more likely to be burgled than in the US. Much of this is blamed on young males who “puff up” the statistics due to their uncivilized behavior. Strong deterrents which were once in place to prevent young people participating in criminal activities are now considered too lenient (Murray 1990:35). The state has become too soft, thus making criminality appealing to those who can’t hold a legitimate job down.

In Murray’s follow up thesis, *Underclass: The Crisis Deepens* (1994) he visits an overspill estate on the outskirts of Liverpool, where he interviews a man he calls ‘Scully’ whom apparently was claiming social support benefits while at the same time doing illegal ‘cash in hand’ jobs. Scully goes on to inform Murray that everyone is at it, pointing out, “The system’s there to be f\*\*\*ed, you’re soft if you don’t” (Murray 1994:119). Stating research conducted at

Heathrow Airport which revealed 72 per cent of minicabs drivers interviewed were illegally claiming unemployment benefits, Murray (1994:119/120) proclaims that Scully's views encapsulate the current situation. The system, Murray (1994:120) declares, is designed to be exploited, as firstly, it is no longer considered by people in poor communities as a "moral black mark against you", and secondly, the chances of getting caught and the penalty if you were caught are very minimal.

The publication of Murray's (1990) controversial thesis created quite a storm among social scientists and from many on the political left in the UK. Even today 23 years on from Murray's first publication it is rare to read accounts on poverty in the UK without coming across reviews of his thesis. Murray along with the support of the powerful and influential right wing think tank; The Institute of Economic Affairs, opened the door for British right-wing intellectuals to question the standard post war views on poverty and deprivation. Notably Patrica Morgan (1995) and David Green (1993) further added critiques of the welfare state, family values, the current criminal justice system, and the unemployed as part of a radical conservative reappraisal (McDonald 1997:8). As the 'radical right' views became more dominant, ironically those on the left found themselves in similar circumstances to the people they were defending - by becoming more excluded from the intellectual ruling ideas on post-industrial poverty. Much of what the left argued became known as Murray (1996:82) proclaimed as, "undiluted statements of left dogma" which were fast disappearing from public opinions. Why the left have struggled in this intellectual argument is something we will evaluate later. First we will address some of the core arguments to the structural approach.

### **2.2.3 Blaming the Victims: Early Structural Accounts of the Underclass**

In section 2.1 we explained how poverty and social-economic inequality arose under Thatcher's premiership. For people like Frank Field (1989:2) 10 years of radical conservative policies have thrown three hundred years of British evolution of citizenship into reverse. By dividing the country into the 'have's and the have not's', Field (1989) argues, those who are excluded from the material benefits of capitalism are the underclass. Thus, unlike Murray, the elderly poor are also included in the 'underclass' arguing social circumstances rather than moral ones are at the core of the debate. Field also includes single parents stranded on welfare dependency under the then current rules, and the long-term unemployed. According to Field (1989:2) all three groups live under a subtle form of political, social and economic apartheid where they are locked out of the affluence enjoyed by the comfortable majority.

Other early work on structural accounts include Ralf Dahrendorf (1987), who too also argues the underclass came about through the economic restructuring but differentiates from Field (1989) by suggesting those caught up in the new poorly paid 'flexible job market' (part-time and casual jobs), the so called (under)employed are also, together with the unemployed, part of the underclass. Poor job opportunities and mass unemployment are not the only contributions to an underclass; low educational achievements, illiteracy, teenage and single motherhood, and terrible housing and neighborhood conditions are all factors. This sort of environment Dahrendorf (1987:4) suggests breeds "social pathologies". The solution revolves around a stakeholder society in which the government and local communities should implement social policies that are designed to refit the excluded back into mainstream society.



## **2.2.4 From Underclass to Social Exclusion**

Both Field (1989) and Dahrendorf (1987) early accounts of the underclass show two scholars trying to understand and grapple with a new emerging social-economic problem. Unlike most sociological theories the underclass debate did not confine itself to the restricted sphere of academia. By the 1990s the underclass theory became a mainstay in media discussions about social welfare, crime and disorder, and changing values and behavioural traits (Hayward and Yar 2006:1). Right wing media outlets notably New International which had originally published Murray's (1990, 1994) work lead the debate on blaming the underclass for changes in moral behaviour. It seems, much of the structural accounts and explanations, which included, social-economic inequality, poverty, and social polarization, through inadequate state provisions, labour market restructuring, and exclusion from political economic and social citizenship were largely confined to academia (Crowther 2000:152).

As already mentioned neoliberal reforms of reducing the welfare state, combined with a dramatic rises in social-economic inequality which weaken public empathy towards the poor, certainly helped support culturalist arguments further. Nevertheless, another reason for the lack of media and public understanding towards structural accounts revolved around the fact that the underclass did not fit with any of the three commonly known definitions of poverty. These is, first, and foremost 'absolute poverty' which can be found in underdeveloped countries where basic human needs are not met, such as, safe drinking water, shelter, and education. Secondly, relative poverty which refers to certain groups in developed countries that lacks the resources to participate in the activities, life styles, and amenities that are customary in those societies. Lastly, 'subjective poverty' is a mental state in which people may feel themselves to be in financial hardship. These three concepts were the

theoretical backbone in understanding poverty for many decades (Butler and Watt, 2007).

Because the underclass did not fit into any of these theories on poverty and as parts of the media created a caricature of the underclass as lazy benefit claimers who lived comfortable lives on government handouts, early accounts of this new form of poverty were ignored by politicians. Indeed, it is estimated public policy of the conservative government during the early 1990s often compounded young people pathways to exclusion (Williamson 1993, cited in Barry 2005:12). Eventually, however, the underclass debate although controversial brought about new thinking with regards to poverty in post-industrial societies (Butler and Watt (2007:109).

It was clear by the mid 1990's a new form of 'poverty' was emerging that social scientists and policy makers alike were struggling to explain and tackle. In 1994 the EU poverty programme that had lasted for 21 years suddenly came to an abrupt end. Poverty in Western Europe was changing, the new buzz word became 'Social Exclusion' which had originated in the social policy of France in the 1980s referring to people who had dropped through the social-security net (Barnes et.al. 2002). Social exclusion was certainly more politically correct than the underclass and opened up the academic door for researchers to study this growing social-economic phenomenon (Percy-Smith 2000:2). What then is social exclusion and how does it differ, and how is it similar to the early underclass debates?

### **2.2.5 Critical Debates on Social Exclusion**

Although a number of concepts of social exclusion were being developed in the 1960s and 1970s, it has only been since the 1990s that an explosion of work on this subject has come about (Percy-Smith 2000). One of the first official definitions came out of early EU debates in 1994 that suggested social exclusion is a “Dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political, or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society” (Walker and Walker 1997:8). In Britain the Department of Social Security in 1999 published its first annual report on poverty and social exclusion that highlighted what they thought was the key features to this socio-economic problem (Department of. Social Security 1999: 24–6, cited in Percy-Smith 2000). They were as follows:

- \* Lack of opportunities to work
- \* Lack of opportunities to achieve education and skills
- \* Childhood deprivation
- \* Disruptive families
- \* Barriers to older people living active, fulfilling and healthy lives
- \* Inequalities in health
- \* Poor housing
- \* Poor neighbourhoods
- \* Fear of crime
- \* Disadvantaged groups

Unfortunately, however, mixing both poverty and social exclusion together can lead to confusion in tackling the issue. Where many would argue social exclusion has its core roots in globalization and economic restructuring, poverty on the other hand, has been around since civilization formed (Munck 2005). As Tony Blair stated in 1997, for people who lack money or material possessions it does not automatically mean they are shut out from society (Atkinson and Hills 1998:9). At the same time, people who are not considered poor may feel socially excluded under certain circumstances. Confusion of the two concepts is one reason for differences of view on the subject. Some argue this has unfortunately lead to a shorthand reduction of a complex phenomenon or, as Atkinson and Hills (1998:13) puts it, social exclusion seems to have become a 'catch all' phase, meaning all things to all people. On similar lines Silver (1994:54) argues, that social exclusion, "is so evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional and elastic that it can be defined in many different ways." Principally, it seems scholars can only agree on a single point; that, it is impossible to define social exclusion by a single and unique criterion (Silver 1994:59).

Therefore, to try and understand this complex subject we must first break it down. For example, much of the work published on social exclusion can be argued to fit into three groups. The biggest group of work looks at economic exclusion, or more precisely, the exclusionary effects of economic restructuring. See, for instance, Brown and Crompton (1994); Paugam (1996), Martin and Hardy (1997), cited in Harrysson and O'Brien (2007:7). The second group focuses on the analysis of poverty and how that is linked to exclusion (Gore and Figueredo 1995). Lastly, and fitting with what we have discussed in the last chapter, some scholars, notably, Levitas (1996, 1998) have made the intimate connection between social exclusion and the

underclass discourse which relates explicitly on the reduction of welfare provision.

What we see with these three classifications in basic terms is, in the first one, a lack of reliable and steady jobs as a result of economic restructuring, in the second a, lack of money and material possessions as a result of poverty, and in the third, a lack of support from the state due to welfare cuts. In addition, and especially in relation to young people it has become commonly acknowledged that the pressures of globalization and technological development means that those leaving school with poor levels of educational attainment are also becoming increasingly vulnerable and disadvantaged in the labour market (Percy-Smith 2000:64). According to the Riot Report (2012) two-thirds of the young people arrested during the 2011 English summer riots were classed as having some form of special educational need. This certainly suggests that a lack of education and qualifications also plays a vital role in social exclusion in today's society.

In Western Europe where economic restructuring and welfare reforms have not been as radical as that of the UK some scholars have looked at social exclusion from a different perspective. Hilary Silver (1994), for instances, identifies what she refers to as three different paradigms of social exclusion, each are different in their concepts of integration and citizenship.

- 1) Solidarity Paradigm - Exclusion occurs when the social bonds between the individual and society breakdown. This paradigm is based on cultural and moral rather than economic factors and relates to Murray's underclass arguments.
- 2) Specialisation Paradigm - Social discrimination from the majority who are well off in society causes the poor to feel excluded.

3) Monopoly Paradigm - The process in which power groups in society control and restrict the access to resources to outsiders through a 'process of social closure'. This may include, for example, decisions of banks on who to offer credit to and who to refuse.

Silver's last paradigm is something the Guardian columnist and former BBC economic adviser Will Hutton (1996) wrote about in the 1990s suggesting Britain had a new 30/30/40 society. Hutton (1996) argued around 30% of the population were disadvantaged by being unemployed or excluded from the labour market. Another 30% were marginalized and had job insecurity and the remaining 40% were the privileged group in society who had secure jobs and pensions, and backed by good education. Munck (2005:23) therefore suggests that we cannot look at social exclusion like many politicians have been doing, believing it is just a minor problem for social engineering in post-industrial countries. Instead Munck (2005:23) argues, it is fundamentally about structural and inherent features of an economic system based on power differentials which make the running of society totally unequal and unfair. For example, we saw in the financial crisis of 2008 the power the financial sector has over the economy. The 'too big to fail' banks were bailed out at the expense of the tax payer. As usual the poorest in society are now feeling the effect of this bailout through austerity.

To conclude, social exclusion theories overall have brought better understanding to the condition of certain people and groups within society. Whereas theories on poverty struggled to adapt to the changes taking place through economic restructuring; social exclusion, on the other hand, brought a fresh perspective by using a multidimensional and multidisciplinary way of thinking towards social inequality. The late 1980s and early 1990s were dominated by underclass theories that simplified social problems to either moral or economic issues depending on which side of the political spectrum

you came from. Although early underclass theories are still used and discussed today they are, however, merely part of a much larger field of study that became social exclusion.

As globalization expanded so did global inequality allowing scholars to study social exclusion from different perspectives. We have highlighted that unemployment, and the lack of money, state support, and education are all key elements. In addition, discrimination and prejudices against the lower classes, and private monopoly powers such as bank which can control who gets what in society all certainly play a part in this to. For New Labour, however, that came to power in 1997 they believed that at the core of social exclusion lied the ‘old intolerable evil’ of unemployment and thus if you get people working, you in turn, will greatly reduce social exclusion in society. This is something we will now evaluate.

#### **2.2.6 New Labour: New Ideas to Tackling Social Exclusion**

*“One challenge above all stands out before we can deserve another historic victory – tackling the scourge and waste of social exclusion” (Peter Mandelson 14 August 1997, Fabian Society, cited in Johnston 2000:3)*

After 18 years of Conservative rule, New Labour came to power in 1997 on a wave of optimism and hope. Their charismatic leader Tony Blair had arrived into office pledging to make Britain a fairer place for all. To do this, the Government set ambitious targets to increase employment rates, reduce child poverty and to tackle social exclusion. Key policy developments included the extension of tax credits to the lowest paid, and the introduction of a ‘New Deal’ which presented a mandatory ‘work-focused interviews’ for all working aged benefits claimants. Tony Blair summed up the new Governments philosophy in this statement below:

*“We were put into office to build a fairer and more modern country, and that’s what we will do...It means modernizing the welfare system so it helps people, rather than holds them back - a welfare system that recognizes work is the best route out of poverty and that the vast majority of people want to work...Our reforms are based on a simple principle - work for those who can, security for those who can’t.” - Tony Blair 1999<sup>29</sup>*

New Labour adopted the theory that the social security system created a culture of ‘welfare dependency’ and therefore instead of returning back to the Old Labour ways of tax and spend policy they announced that they wanted to keep the welfare budget within the old Conservative government spending targets (Bishof 2004:21). Nonetheless, whereas, throughout the neoliberal reforms of the Thatcher/Major years (which seriously aggravated inequality) – it was believed that economic growth would solve any residual problems of social exclusion in the long run. New Labour, on the other hand, saw social exclusion and the existence of an underclass as obstacles to economic growth because welfare dependency was considered to increase wage inflationary pressures on the labour market (Cochrane 1999:199). Haughton et al., (2000:670) neatly explain these differences between the two parties by highlighting that:

*“In place of the indifference and neglect of the Conservative years, when unemployment was simply the price that had to be paid for controlling inflation and when the prevailing governmental response to the existence of poverty was one of denial, Labour has launched a raft of new policies and initiatives in this area while setting itself exacting poverty-alleviation targets”*

This New Labour policy, of course, begs us to ask the question, how did they hope to achieve employment for those that can work and security for those that cannot without reverting back to a Keynesian demand management economy?

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<sup>29</sup> BBC News - Blair determined on welfare reform 23 May 1999:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/350558.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/350558.stm) - accessed 12.7.13



It was after all neoliberal reform policies in the first place that destroyed the full employment agenda. The answer, New Labour believed, was in their ‘third way’ approach. Blair used the globalization narrative to support his argument that no country was immune from these massive unstoppable macro changes. While old Labour values, Blair argued, remain the same, such as, community, inclusion, fairness, and social justice - the old view of Keynesian macro-economic management theory seemed obsolete in a globalized economy (Driver and Martell 1998:41). Therefore, New Labour reverted to a micro-government programme right from the offset which included eliminating welfare dependency and welfare statism through a mandatory neo-liberal strategy of workfarism (Jessop 2003:19).

In theory, New Labour believed by getting people back in to work and off benefits this would obviously reduce public spending on welfare and subsequently increase tax revenues. Then instead of following the old Conservative policy of giving out tax breaks from the savings generated, New Labour, would spend that money on providing ‘security’ for vulnerable groups, such as, the disabled, elderly, young, and single mothers. All of which, again in theory, would limit the most serious forms and effects of social exclusion, while at the same time promoting both economic efficiency and social justice (Jessop 2003:19). Notably, it also prevented upsetting the crucial swing voters of Middle England that went on to help New Labour win three election campaign victories in a row. Let us now address New Labours theory of solving social exclusion in practice.

### **2.2.7 The New Deal for Young People: “Bridging the Gap”**

What we have not fully explained so far is that under economic restructuring many manufacturing jobs were offshored reducing the level of low qualified but reasonably well paid jobs available in the market. As a result, as these low qualified jobs became less accessible, the entry level for almost all other jobs has risen over the past decades. Nowadays, jobs that were once open to non-graduates are now adding degree qualifications to their requirements - although, it seems even a high level of education is no secure path into employment. In simple terms, what this means is competition for jobs has become so strong that those without qualification are getting further excluded from additional areas of the job market (Bishof 2004). Therefore, getting socially excluded young people without higher education qualifications back into the job market became an issue the new government wanted to address.

In 1998 The National Youth Agency published a report that identified what they believed were the four main reasons why young people are unemployed and which therefore should be addressed by active labour market programmes. These were:

1. **Specific Skills and Qualifications:** Many young people leaving education do not acquire the skills and experiences that businesses are looking for.
2. **Attitudes and Behaviour:** There is growing belief among employers that young people do not know how to behave at work and thus this immature characteristic has become a stigma that some employers hold against young people.

3. **Work Ethic and Commitment:** This is another prejudice held by many employers that suggest often young people do not have the ‘right work ethic’ and this particularly the case for those who have never had a full time job before.
4. **Application:** Studies suggest employers think that young people are often not very well prepared for interviews and the application process. It seems young people lack the ability to positively present themselves and find it difficult to understand what qualities employers look for/want.

All four reasons stated by the National Youth Agency indicated a failure on the supply side. The argument was clear, young people leaving education were neither well enough trained nor educated in the fields employers wanted. Young people also, according to the employers’ opinion, lacked work ethics and personal skills needed in the modern flexible labour market (National Youth Agency 1998). As a result, in 1998 under the new Government Welfare-to-Work programme, The New Deal for Young People (NDYP) was introduced nationally. The focus was primary on helping young people who had been unemployed for six months or over by, one, finding them a lasting job, and two, providing them with skills to increase their long-term employability.

During the initial Gateway stage of the programme, assistance was provided to the participants in the form of job search and basic skills development. If the participant was still unemployed four months after entering the Gateway then they were given three options to choose from; full time education and training, work experience through a job placement, or subsidised employment. Importantly if the participant did not comply and undertake one of the options

available to them they would lose their unemployment benefits (Riley and Young 2000:5)

Unlike other youth training programmes such as the New Job Training Scheme, introduced in 1987 and Modern Apprenticeships, introduced in 1995, the NDYP claimed to be different from what went before. First it was massively funded by a £5.2bn budget that came from a one-off windfall tax on the profits of the utilities privatized during the Thatcher-Major years. Second, the well-funded programme claimed that young people would be individually catered for by adapting job search and training around the participant's personal needs and circumstances. And lastly, the NDYP gave young people a clear incentive to develop their employability by imposing strict benefits sanctions for those that did not take responsibility for their action (Riley and Young 2000:5).

Finn (2003) has argued there were two key aims to the NDYP. In the short run, it aimed at providing relief from unemployment either by subsidizing business who took on young people or by giving people tax credits to overcome financial barriers into work. Moreover, to make lower paid jobs more attractive, the New Labour Government introduced a minimum wage in April 1999. In the long run, the NDYP would provide education and training to enable people to maintain their employability status. This second point refers directly to the post-Fordism world view where businesses and individuals must have the capacity to adapt rapidly and to respond flexibly to diverse and unpredictable market changes. In essence the NDYP aimed at creating a culture of lifelong learning to prepare people for the changing demands of the labour market in a post-Fordism economy (Jessop 2003).

### **2.2.8 The New Deal for Young People: Success or Failure?**

Two years after the NDYP programme began the Prime Minister Tony Blair called the project a great success offering young people real hope and opportunity - following reports that suggested it had secured jobs for more than 250,000 in that time.<sup>30</sup> Statistics in August 2003, five years after the program began, by the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) highlighted that in total around 1 million young people had started the NDYP with around half of them going into employment, of which, 351,700 were sustained (Bishof 2004:34). The Conservatives, however, called it a waste of money arguing the strength of economy, which saw a general expansion of employment during the late 90s and early 2000s, meant many young people would have found a job regardless. Instead the Conservatives wanted to scrap the NDYP and create a new programme called “Britain Works” focusing on training young people so they have the skills needed to meet the economy’s requirements (see footnote 33).

Others pointed out that despite the reduction in long term youth employment, many young people failed to retain a job for 13 weeks. This was especially the case among minority ethnic groups in many inner urban and depressed industrial labour markets where mass unemployment leads to a vicious cycle of “recycling and churning” of participants (Martin et al, 2001:1). However, people directly involved in the NDYP argued while finding young people work was important it should not be the only criterion to reflect the success of the programme. They emphasized that some of the least employable who were usually from broken homes or had very difficult up bringing made significant

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<sup>30</sup> BBC News Labour claims New Deal success 30 Nov 2000: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1047694.stm> - accessed 21.9.13

progress in the programme without necessarily getting a job. As one New Deal advisor stated:

*“Jobs can’t be the only test. We have helped change people’s lives... It’s very very difficult to show it. They might not move on into work but they’ve moved on. They’ve gained such a lot. They’ve got more confident. They are able to talk to other people. Its that kind of thing, and I don’t think New Deal gets enough credit for that.” (Finn 2003:13)*

It seems clear from this point that social returns are sometimes just as important as economic ones and thus this is a major shortcoming of the quantitative research done on the NDYP. Qualitative research, moreover, explained clearly what young people wanted out of the programme – a ‘reasonable job’ that offered security and opportunities for enhancing skills and earning power (Finn 2003:10).

They did not want to take a short-term agency job or even worse a ‘Mcjob’<sup>31</sup> the message from young people was clear:

*“No-one at this table wants to work at McDonald’s nobody here thinks “yes I’d like a career at McDonald’s”...If they were given the opportunity to do something in the areas that they want, then they’d take it...Give people the opportunity to do something they are really good at rather than a crap job – then there’d be rush to get off the dole” (Finn 2003:10).*

This comment cuts through the quantitative numbers analysis that Politian’s can so easily play on for conformation of any success. It perhaps explains the core contradictions between New Deal policies and what jobs are actually available in the ‘flexible’ service lead economy for low educated youth. At the end of the day someone has to do the ‘Mcjobs’ which serve the needs of the

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<sup>31</sup> McJob is slang for a low-paying, low-prestige dead-end job that requires few skills and offers very little chance of intercompany advancement.

current economy<sup>32</sup>. Butler and Watt's (2005:139) have argued that if Ford and its factory production line work represented the post-war period then McDonalds represent the post-Fordism era of low skilled and easily replaceable labour which is essential for many companies competing under the strain of market forces.

Fast-food companies have been at the vanguard of businesses demanding ever more flexibility of working conditions, leading to involvement in lobbying governments to lower the minimum legal rates of pay for young workers (Butler and Watt's 2005:139). Unquestionably, the current flexible labour market conditions impact most on those with least bargaining power, such as, the low paid, less well educated, and less experienced workers (which are usually young people). We may argue then that the NDYP did not fully tackle this problem and in many respects actually encourage the 'flexploitation' of young people as it pushed through its agenda of workfarism.

To summarise, while the NDYP may have helped some young people find a job that met their requirements and offered future opportunities, many inevitably ended up as 'losers of globalization' through the flexplotation of the labour market. This is the 30% of society that Hutton (1996) describe as disadvantaged and excluded from economic prosperity. Minor social engineering is not going to solve this problem. Regardless of whether or not we view the NDYP as a success or failure there are two key points to mention. First, with around 1 million young people unemployed at present the long-term benefits of the programme certainly did not materialise. This is down to the fact that schemes such as the NDYP depend significantly on economic growth.

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<sup>32</sup> For example in America between 1994 and 1997, only 19,000 jobs were created in high-wage fields like manufacturing. However, more than 400,000 jobs were created in retail stores during the same period, which were typically low skilled and poorly paid (Newman 2000:xii)

It is well known the youth labour market is particularly vulnerable during recessions.

The second point indicates that active labour market policies such as the NDYP which adopted a coercive approach to social inclusion, in general do not take enough account of young people's views on career goals and aspirations as they are in simple Marxist terms merely commodities used to meet the needs of labour market flexibility and international competition (Jessops 2003). This failure to respect young people's own priorities whilst at the same time pushing through the workfare approach that punishes participants who refuse to take a job offered only serves to alienate young people from the policies that are supposed to assist them (Bendit and Hahn-Bleibtreu 2008:70/71). In the next section I will present the findings of various field researchers before going on to present my own. In this context, we will argue instead of achieving social inclusion qualitative research suggest government policies have continued to stigmatise young people in their transition which has further increased their propensity to social exclusion.



## **2.3 Ethnographic Research on Youth Transition**

### **2.3.1 Research Conducted in North East England**

There is perhaps nowhere in England which felt the effects of economic restructuring more than the North East region of the country. Commonly known as a traditional ‘working class’ area, it was once a powerhouse of British industry characterized by heavy industries such as coal mining, iron and steel production, ship building, chemicals and engineering (Butler and Watt 2005:157). All of which, offered highly skilled and well paid manual employment for men who were safely supported by trade union collective power. However, due to deindustrialization, between 1975-90, the region lost over 200,000 manufacturing jobs, and since then the continuing expansion of globalization which in turn has increased global competitiveness has resulted in further job losses (Butler and Watt 2005:158). For example, major corporations, such as, of Fujitsu and Siemens both closed their North East branches in the late 1990s as they sought to reduce their operational cost by moving production abroad. As a result, for over 2 decades the North East has been plagued with under investment and high levels of unemployment that are well above the national average. For young working class people in this region, the transition from education to the workforce has become highly problematic making this a popular area for scholars to study this growing sociological problem.

### **2.3.2 Disconnected Youth? Macdonald and Marsh (2001)**

This study was set in East Kelby, Teeside, Northeast England, an area in the top 5 per cent most deprived in the country (MacDonald and Marsh 2001:376). East Kelby is a textbook example of all the ‘joined up’ problems of social exclusion, with high levels of crime, unemployment, and health problems, and low levels of educational achievement, and community satisfaction. The

research involved interviews with 40 professional ‘stake-holders’ who worked with young people (e.g. probation officers, NDYP advisors). It also involved participant observation carried out over a year in youth clubs, unwaged groups, and ‘on the street’, and lastly 88 detailed qualitative interviews with young people aged between 15-25 years. Virtually all were ‘ethnically white’ and all were from ‘working-class’ backgrounds (MacDonald and Marsh 2001:377).

The research pointed out some important features to youth transition in deprived areas. It seems all of the 88 young people interviewed were neither wholly nor permanently disconnected from jobs in their post-school transitions. Although it is important to note that at the time of research the UK economy was benefiting from an economic expansion. What is clear, however, is the education to work transition for all 88 interviewees were “characterized by the cyclical movement around various permutations of government schemes and college courses, low-paid, low-skill, and often temporary jobs (e.g. food processing and textile factories, fast-food outlets, retail shops), recurrent unemployment (with or without benefits) and, for a minority, occasional voluntary work or irregular fiddly work” (McDonald and Marsh 2001:386). The frequency of change between schemes was different across the participants; nonetheless, the nature of their school to work transition was much the same - all were trapped in these insecure, unstable and marginal careers that epitomized the limited options available at the bottom of the local labour market (McDonald and Marsh 2001:386).

MacDonald and Marsh (2001:387/388) concluded by arguing that the NDYP is failing to secure social inclusion for most young people in Teeside. Entry into employment for many did not provide that ‘first step’ toward a path away from joblessness. And even if the quality of jobs and wages received were good enough to lift them out of the position of ‘working poor’ (which it did not)

they still remained in a predominantly insecure environment. The overriding findings suggested that becoming employed if you are young and poor was typically a temporary experience as redundancy, contract expirations, or what participants described as unfair dismissals (e.g. they reported being sacked for taking 1 day off work 'on the sick') were all common in their employment careers.

### **2.3.3 Race, Place and Globalization: Nayak (2003)**

Nayak (2003) does not focus specifically on youth tradition, nevertheless his finding give great insight into the changing formations of youth culture under the backdrop of globalization. The research draws upon the macro impact of labour market restructuring and what Nayak refers to as the 'culture of globalization' and how both have had a profound influence on the micro landscape of contemporary youth culture. While traditionally sociologists have focused upon occupational, income, educational and social mobility, Nayak argues there is a highly meaningful relationship between place and identity (Nayak 2003:175). Concentrating specifically on class, gender and ethnicity Nayak offers a critique of youth subcultures that have emerged within the boundaries of the exclusively 'white hinterland' region of Northeast England. The core of Nayak's 1 year ethnography revolves around three alternative youth cultures he identifies: 'Real Geordies', 'Charver Kids' and 'Wiggers', 'Wannabes' or 'White Negroes' all of whom at some level embrace certain elements of globalization while on other levels completely reject it.

The Real Geordies are predominantly white working class males whose fathers and older generations worked as skilled laborers in the heavy industries of a bygone Northeast England. Male bonding, mutual respect and hard work (grafting) once symbolized a proud working class tradition in the region. However for the Real Geordies these traditions have faded as the once'

learning to labour' has been transformed into the less masculine role of 'learning to serve'. Masculine pride for Real Geordies is now formulated in certain leisure and consumption activities such as the ability to drink copious amounts of alcohol and to passionately follow the local football team Newcastle United.

The Charver Kids are represented by both male and females and are well-known to live on the 'sink' council estates of Britain's inner cities. Nayak (2003) argues that unlike the Real Geordies this group is considered by society as not quite 'white' for factors such as the mix of minority ethnic groups who also live on these 'sink' estates. Renowned for their distinctive urban street style of tracksuits, trainers, and bling (chunky gold jewelry), the Charver Kids are influenced by music and fashion that is not traditionally appreciated by many in society. Place and locality plays a very important part in building their character due to the fact that they very rarely venture out of their estate and have little sense of events outside the local neighborhood boundaries (Nayak 2003).

In this respect, crime which is an endemic on 'sink' estates mixed with lower class culture play a big role in shaping the Charver Kids characteristics and 'way of life'. If the Real Geordies world of work was shaped by uncertain service based employment, the Charver kids were living in a world where their appearance and stereotyped image at best limited their job opportunities and at worst completely excluded them from employment. In view of that, local 'black market' economies are very common on 'sink' estates which help Charver kids and their families maintain a certain materialistic life style. This, however, further excludes them from mainstream society through mass resentment of their illegitimate ways.

The Wiggers, Wannabes and White Negroes are also groups of young men and women who through globalization or more specifically ‘Americanization’ have integrated and reoriented ‘whiteness’ around ‘cool’ black culture. Global networks such as MTV, that display and promote multi-ethnic world cultures through music, materialism (e.g. fashion and consumption), and sports become desirable models for young people to follow (Nayak 2003:120). Despite the limited presence in the North East of a local black population, these young people have in essence created a hybrid notion of whiteness/blackness, resisting and in some forms directly challenging the traditional north east culture that the Real Geordies try to uphold in some limited fashion.

We can perhaps draw some similarities between the Wiggers, Wannabes and White Negroes and the emerging youth culture of post-World War II. For example Richard Hoggart (1958) research identified the influence American culture notably entertainment such as music and films had on British working classes styles of dress, hair, and leisure. This focus on identity in the construction of working-class youth subcultures continued into the 1970s and 1980s, with the likes of Hebdige (1979) examining the ways in which unique styles (such as punk) formed part of a resistance to the marginalization of the working classes in the context of postcolonial decline and economic crisis (Haywood and Yar 2006:4).

In this respect, under the backdrop of social exclusion Nayak’s (2003) work offers an interesting and spatial approach to modern day British working class youth culture that allow us to understand the role globalization and de-industrialization has played on the formation of new sub-cultures within a local context. If we refer back to the simplistic underclass debates of the early 90s the Real Geordies would have perhaps been seen as the deserving poor, the Charver Kids as the undeserving, and the Wiggers, Wannabes and White

Negroes as somewhere in-between. However, as Nayak's (2003) work has shown, economic and cultural divisions among the lower classes are far more complex than is lead to believe. In practice each group is trying to create their own identity, responding differently to the continuing social, economic and cultural transformations taking place under the backdrop of globalization.

It is clear the Real Geordies are the least marginalized through a more traditional suburban up-bringing, which gives them opportunities to find legitimate work in the albeit unstable and insecure local service market. On the other hand, the other two groups through a mixture of deprived inner city environments, direct exposure to immigration, and the alluring access to global networks of multi-cultural lifestyles have subsequently created a setting in which they rebel and reject mainstream 'British' life. Instead they form their own unorthodox identities, culture and communities. These unconventional lifestyles have a tendency to clash with the requirements of a 'homogeneous' labour market leaving many excluded, marginalized, and alienated from legitimate employment.

#### **2.3.4 Transitions to Work: Masculine Identities, Youth Inequality and Labour Market Change: McDowell (2002)**

In similar fashion to Nayak's (2003) 'Real Geordies' but in a more in-depth analysis, McDowell (2002) studies what impact the collapse of skilled manual work has had on male masculine identity. In a simplified story of events, young males leaving school in the post-war period with little educational achievements were safely guaranteed a skilled job with an adequate wage to live off. Masculinity in one sense was the only qualification needed (McDowell 2002:56). Of course, as we mention before the new service economy format has meant many young men from working class backgrounds are finding it hard to acquire the skills and qualifications available to obtain

the reasonably paid new service based jobs. Not only that, as we touch on in the last section modern day working class traditions, cultural attitudes and networks, disadvantage young men in their initial labour market entry. And even if successful their appearance, bodily stance and style of interaction (low self-esteem and confidence sometimes masked by a laddish culture of loutish behaviour) often counts against them (Bourgois, 1995; Newman, 1999; cited in McDowell 2002:40).

It appears to some that in contemporary education young men are now seen as a problem, as failures, unable to get to grips with the demand of educational achievement (McDowell 2002:40). Girls, on the other hand, have been excelling and out performing boys in almost all subjects since the 1990s. Whereas there may still be a gender gap in pay and opportunities in modern Britain, overall since economic restructuring a wider variety of better paid job opportunities have emerged for career seeking girls. According to McDowell (2002) this rise in female career achievements, along with the failure of young men in school and the labour market seems only to fuel an immature ‘laddish’ culture (that is partly a defence mechanism to their circumstances). All of which, is represented as a key part to the growing ‘crisis of masculinity’ (McDowell 2002:41). This certainly fits with Nayak’s (2003) ‘Real Geordies’ who through working in low pay service jobs intuitively try to claim back their masculinity through drinking copious amount of alcohol with their male friends (laddish culture). However, this sort of behaviour according to research of Campbell (1993) and Phillips (1993) only serves to increase their unattractiveness as lifetime partners for women (McDowell 2002:41).

McDowell (2002:55) concludes by arguing that Labour market entry and access to decent employment opportunities continue to be structured by class differences. Boys from lower classes who leave school with few educational

credentials face the prospect of limited opportunities which may have severe ramifications on their masculinity and pride. This further excludes them from obtaining and achieving the conventional markers of adulthood. According to McDowell (2002:56), new ways of redefining masculinity need to be addressed so that young men are able to deal with economic and social changes without further self-harming their transition into adulthood.

### **2.3.5 Snakes and Ladders: Young People, Transitions, and Social Exclusion: Johnston, et.al. (2000)**

Funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation this was major piece of research conducted by five of Britain's most experienced sociologists in the field of youth transition. Set in the deprived area of Willowdene, Teeside, the research involved stakeholder Interviews, participant observation, and interviews with 98 young people. From the 98 biographical sketches Johnston, et.al. (2000) picked out six cameos of youth transition that they argued identified key themes which cut across the data.

*"We have selected six people because this allows us both to explore individual biographies in depth and to illustrate the diverse experiences encountered across the sample. The people chosen – Rebecca, Matthew, John, Holly, Pauline, and Lee – were at the time of interview engaged in the different sorts of activities suggested by our initial career typology."*  
(Johnston, et.al. 2000:7)

Unlike some youth transition papers that have specifically focused on the process of school to work, Johnston, et.al. (2000) brought a broader concept to the study by also taking into account three other 'careers' that are part of the makeup of deprived neighbourhoods. These are, Family and Housing career (leaving parental home, family formation, housing and homelessness), Criminal careers (black market activities and involvement with the criminal justice system), and Drug careers (involvement with illicit drugs) (Butler and



Watt (2005:159/160). Indeed, for many of the participants their school to work transitions was complex and involved for some at certain stages, both legal and illegal activities. It was clear none of the participants could be put into some kind of neat, orderly and linear fashion that is sometimes found in higher more stable and career focused parts of society.

Notwithstanding the complexity of the transitions encountered, Johnston, et.al (2000) stress the following analytical issues are indicative across the full range of interviews and these are as follows:

- The unpredictability, insecurity and contingency of the transition - It was very difficult for the researchers to predict what would happen next to any of the participants. Scarcity of opportunities and stable jobs in an area filled with high crime rates and deprivation meant every biography was walking a thin-line in their transition period.
- The importance of life events as major turning points in young people's lives – Small variances such as having an empathic, thoughtful and caring teacher was sometimes the difference in how certain individuals future turned out (a good teacher could prevent a student from dropping out of education into a world of crime).
- The importance of understanding unlawful transition routes – Both criminal and drug careers could have a profound impact on all aspects of a young person's transition. For example, young people with a criminal record found it even more difficult to find paid work and social housing, which usually meant they became stuck in a cycle of illegitimate ways that 'got them by'.

- The relevance of seeing youth transition over a longer period – On reflection it was considered the 16-19 year age band was too narrow to wholly encapsulate the nature of youth transition.
  
- The multi-dimensional relationship between structural controls and personal agency in influencing youth transition – The wide range of transitional routes taken by the 98 participant's show individuals can make clear decisions reflecting their own agency at certain times. Nevertheless, as one participant put it, "I try to make the best out of the choices available but I have no control over what choices are available" (Johnston, et al. 2000:21). In this context, young people can make choices but within heavily constrained opportunity structures that are characteristic of their local area.
  
- The importance of traditional working class ways of life on modern youth culture – Despite a high crime rate and drug problem which could play a part in school disengagement, many young people in general adhered to conventional life styles that strongly preferred work and responsibility over benefits and hand-outs.
  
- The comfort and significance of locality for youth transition – Seen as an oxy-moronic state of affairs, the deprived and poverty stricken area of Willowdene, on the one hand, limits the future opportunities of many local young people. However, on the other hand, like in Nayak's (2003) findings we see very few of those interviewed ventured out of the local area. Therefore, a sense of well-being was formed through local knowledge and informal social networks that provided the resources to manage and regulate their life in Willowdene (Johnston et.al. 2000:23). Principally this relates to the fact that within their local area many feel

socially included but beyond the neighbourhood boundaries unfamiliarity gave a sense of exclusion for young people whose views and understanding of the world is defiantly shaped by their locality.

As highlighted here, Johnston's, et.al (2000) research explain many important points that open up the complexity of youth transition. Perhaps one of the most striking observations is how class formation can take place under structural conditions that are beyond the control of young peoples lives. However, at the same time, through using broader concepts of youth transition the research allows us to see how individual agency plays an important role in defining the destiny (albeit limited in scope) of young people through the choices made available to them.

I will now turn to my own research, integrating, comparing and contrasting what we have learnt so far through the economic and sociological theories and findings that we have explained in this chapter.

## **3. Research Methods**

### **3.1 Back Ground to Fieldwork**

#### **3.1.1 Young People and Methodology Design**

Conducting research on young people is no simple task. Over recent decades young people have been at the centre of much research, policy-making and practice. Despite this however, information exploring and explaining the methodological issues facing youth researchers is still considered limited in scope (Hopkins 2010:27). Therefore, stepping into the world of youth culture, development and transition is likely to involve a lot of trial and error.

I decided at an early stage that quantitative research in the form of large scale questionnaires, surveys, and various other forms of data analysis was inappropriate for the type of young people (disadvantaged) I wanted to study. There are several reasons for this. First, as was shown by quantitative research on the New Deal for Young People (see 2.2.8), the results limited the understanding of the complexity of youth transition. Secondly, some young people may perceive quantitative research such as questionnaires as a piece of ‘boring coursework’ which they may not take seriously. In addition, some may see it as an intrusion into their private lives (Hopkins 2010:47). Thirdly, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have low levels of literacy making any type of self-completion questionnaires difficult and possibly humiliating to complete. Fourthly, Heath et, al. (2009) have suggested that young people often feel obliged to give the ‘right’ answer to adults in authority, answers which are not necessarily the honest answer. And finally, if the quantitative design is flawed this can produce unwieldy and messy data

sets which in my case would have created significant challenges considering the limited time and resources available (Hopkins 2010:47).

Taking all of the above into account, it became clear that a qualitative case study analysis would be most appropriate. This would allow for a richer and more detailed data collection on each young person's opinions and experiences. I also felt many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds would enjoy the chance to sit and talk and give their unrestricted views and opinions on their lives and environment and indeed this turned out to be true amongst most participants. Furthermore, it allowed me to focus on the needs of the individual, trying out a range of creative techniques to see what worked best. In addition, in this situation I could be especially attentive to subtle cues and could gear my questioning accordingly. Of course, there are disadvantages with this form of data collection and therefore I will explain how I tried to overcome these limitations to maximize the participant's involvement.

### **3.1.2 Interviews with Young People Part 1: The First Five**

At the core of the research was a series of recorded semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 28 young people aged between 16-24 from Knowsley. In total I interviewed 33 young people but I have decided not to include 5 of these in the formal results and to use these instead as practice interviews, to learn what questions and probes worked best. Indeed, it was clear after the first few interviews that my structured approach was hindering the process. In addition, some of my questions were either difficult for participants to understand or they were unwilling to answer for a number of reasons. For example, when I referred to David Cameron's attack on young people ("their rights outweigh their responsibilities and their actions do not have consequences") many simply did not understand what this meant. Moreover, the first 5 participants were all interviewed individually on their own and it was apparent that this

was uncomfortable for some of them. As a result those who felt uncomfortable held back from fully answering the questions.

### **3.1.3 Interviews with Young People Part 2: The Twenty-eight**

After the disappointment of the first five interviews some simple but very effective procedures were put in place to maximize results. Firstly, I discarded the questions I had constructed and began most interviews with a few minutes of ‘small talk’ about, for example, the local current news (football scores, celebrity gossip, etc.), to try and make the participant more relaxed and comfortable. I would then begin by asking every participant the same question: “could you explain a little bit about what you have been doing since leaving school.” From here I would build on whatever the individual had talked about looking for openings which could uncover anything of real interest to my work. This worked well because it allowed the participants to talk about (within reason) what they wanted, which then allowed them to open up more and relax. At the same time I still subtly controlled the flow and structure of the interviews by constantly keeping the conversation related to my field of research.

It became clear early on that the young people I met at the employment fair usually had at least one friend with them who was of similar age and situation. As a result, I decided whenever possible to interview two friends together. It was obvious that many young people felt more comfortable with their friend beside them, and it also allowed me to increase the number of people I could interview in each setting, whilst still being able to focus on each individual. Interestingly, whenever one participant was struggling to articulate their point the friend usually helped them out which gave me a better understanding of their views and opinions. The success of this interviewing technique was then applied to the local businesses I visited as usually these companies had

employed a number of apprentices/young people of similar age and background who had become friends with one and another. Of course using this interview technique I had to be aware that two young people together may deliberately exaggerate their circumstances or be unwilling to truthfully answer some questions because of personal sensitivities. However, I believe in my case this did not seem to be the case and any allegation or implausible events were checked and verified through stakeholders and other young people.

The interviews sought to collect comprehensive, narrative accounts of the various proceedings, experiences and circumstances which made up the young person's post-school transition up to the time of interview. Although each interview had limited structure the aim was to try and enable each young person to provide a biographic description of the events and situations which lead them to their current circumstances. This usually included getting them to talk about their views on the local area, why they had taken certain decisions and not others and what sort of aspirations and expectations they had for the future.

### **3.1.4 Stakeholder Interviews**

The other core area of the fieldwork consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 'stakeholders' (such as professionals who work with disadvantaged young people on a day to day basis). In total 12 people were interviewed with most conversations lasting around 1 to 2 hours at a time. The purpose of these stakeholder interviews was three-fold: to check and validate claims made by young people from an informed independent perspective; to gain the views of local experts on the problems facing young people in their transition; and finally, stakeholder's would usually provide access to an additional sample of young people who could be interviewed. An unexpected

bonus occurred by talking to a number of local taxi drivers who shuttled me from one place to another across Knowsley. It seemed, many of the taxi drivers were in their 50's and had experienced at first-hand the massive economic restructuring that occurred in the 1980s. As a result, there were many insightful conversations about the break down in social cohesion and morality in the local area.

### **3.1.5 Participant Observation**

The fieldwork also included participant observation techniques to enrich and provide greater understanding to the qualitative data collected on young people. I felt it was important to visit places young people talked negatively or positively about. I also actively engaged and talked to organizations that are in the business of helping young people find work or training. This included Huyton Job Centre and a number of local job agencies where many of the participants went to seek work. I also felt it was important to spend time walking around the areas where young people 'hung out' simply to observe and study their behaviour and attitudes.

### **3.1.6 Sample Techniques**

There were three basic criteria all participants had to meet:

- Aged between 16 and 24 and had finished secondary school
- Reside in Knowsley
- From a disadvantaged or 'working class' background<sup>33</sup>

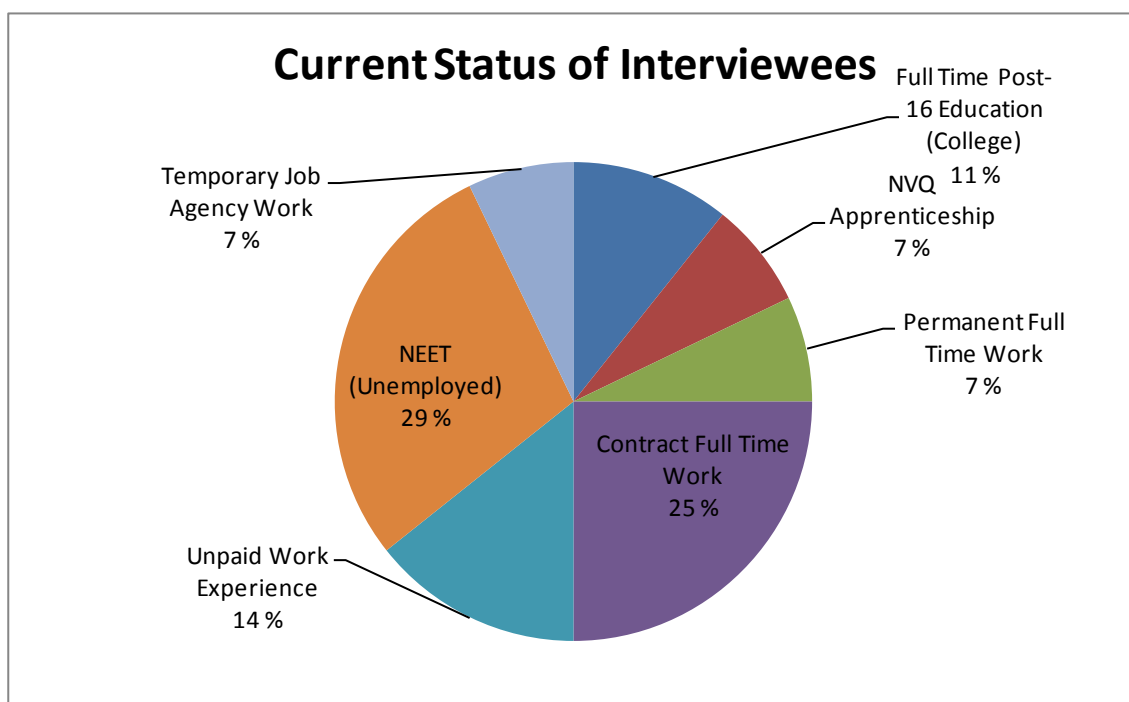
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<sup>33</sup> The location of where participants lived and their current situation gave clear indication to their socio-economic status.



Eleven were randomly selected at a local youth employment fair in one of Knowsley's most deprived areas and from that four more were introduced to me through a snowball sample at the same employment fair. The job fair was organized for the benefit of Knowsley residents aged between 16 and 24 seeking job and training opportunities. Over 400 young people turned up that day, with the majority being either unemployed, employed but looking for a job/career change, or still in further education and interested in finding out about possible opportunities after education. The other 13 participants were sourced from a network of adults working in Knowsley who suggested young people they thought would be interested in being interviewed and who met the eligibility criteria.

### 3.1.7 The Sample



**Table 1: Profile of the Sample** (from 28 interviews): 27 White; 1\* British Indian<sup>34</sup>

| <b>Age</b>   | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>16</b>    | 1           | 2             | 3            |
| <b>17</b>    | 1           | 4             | 5            |
| <b>18</b>    | 2           | 1             | 3            |
| <b>19</b>    | 4           | 1             | 5            |
| <b>20</b>    | 1           | 2*            | 3            |
| <b>21</b>    | 3           | 3             | 6            |
| <b>22</b>    | 1           | 0             | 1            |
| <b>23</b>    | 0           | 1             | 1            |
| <b>24</b>    | 0           | 1             | 1            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>13</b>   | <b>15</b>     | <b>28</b>    |

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<sup>34</sup> The Borough has a comparatively small Black and Minority Ethnic population, representing fewer than 2% of the population.

### **3.1.8 Limitations and Potential Problems**

This was undoubtedly an ambitious project for a solo researcher with only 6 weeks and limited resources available. The hope was however that the qualitative data collected would provide an overview of how young people make the transition from school to work in Knowsley. Caution clearly needs to be exercised when making assumptions and drawing conclusions from research which was both time limited and based on a very small sample size. Had time permitted, it would have been useful to have had follow up interviews with a number of the participants and to have spent time with them in other environments gaining their trust and better understanding their history, character, beliefs, and problems.

It was also a challenge to determine the key characteristics of a representative sample of 16 to 24 year olds as it would appear that there is no data held which captures key statistics for this particular age group. However, unemployment (meaning those on Job Seekers Allowance) among 18-24 year olds stands at 11.4% (July 2013)<sup>35</sup>. The sample within my study has a significantly higher number (29%) of unemployed which is not surprising when one takes into account that around half of the participant were picked from an employment fair where large numbers of unemployed young people were present. The sample did however have a good balance of gender and occupational status allowing youth transition in Knowsley to be observe from different perspectives.

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<sup>35</sup> Knowsley Labour Market Bulletin July 2013: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/Labour-Market-Bulletin-July-2013.pdf> - accessed 10.9.13

### **3.1.9 Research Area: A Case Study of Knowsley**

The Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley is located within Merseyside, and borders the well-known city of Liverpool. It comprises the towns and districts of Kirkby, Prescott, Huyton, Whiston, Halewood, Cronton, and Stockbridge Village. The fieldwork was predominantly carried out in three of these districts, Prescott, Huyton, and Stockbridge Village. These districts were either built or expanded in the 1960s to rehouse some 200,000 people from Liverpool's inner-city slum clearances<sup>36</sup>. At the time these new residential areas beyond Liverpool's borders were welcome respite to many who moved. As one resident of Huyton who remembered the rehousing project stated: "I'd never seen a blade of grass until I moved to Knowsley!"

Knowsley, in common with many other areas of Britain became characterized by its high rise and walk-up blocks of flats which initially offered great views to residents and provided more space for recreational activities within its parks and playgrounds. Seen as a quick fix to both the unsanitary 19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings and as a means to address the shortage of houses created from Second World War bombing, these blocks of flats were initially welcomed by the local population. However, their popularity soon faded as problems with the street planning, building design, structure and lack of amenities turned them into undesirable low cost housing. In addition, high levels of crime, created in part by the lay-out of the estates, meant they also developed a notorious reputation.

As Mike Carter, the former Chief Executive of Stockbridge Village Trust and former Deputy Chief Executive of Knowsley Borough Council put it:

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<sup>36</sup> Liverpool as a key port city had been heavily bombed during the Second World War leaving many people dishoused.

*"Cantril Farm (known today as Stockbridge Village)...a planners dream...was intended to be a model green belt housing estate to decant people from Liverpool's decaying city centre. Built in the mid 1960's for a population of 15,000, the dream lasted only until people tried to live there."<sup>37</sup>*

Picture 1: Stockbridge Village Tower Blocks



It is estimated that the decline of Knowsley's post-war housing estates occurred within just 10 years of their initial creation. Local social cohesion and stability was underpinned by heavy industry jobs. The subsequent restructuring and mass redundancies that occurred in the area in the 1970s and 1980s therefore had huge ramifications for poorly designed estates such as Cantril Farm. By 1982, unemployment on Cantril Farm was 49% amongst males and 80% amongst young people creating an ideal environment within which crime flourished and within which crime levels rose dramatically.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The History of Stockbridge Village: <http://resources.pihomebuild.com/sites/585/docs/SVHistory.pdf> -accessed 9.9.13

The picture was similar across many poor areas of Merseyside. According to a Joseph Rowntree Foundation Study, Merseyside's industrial decline has been much broader and deeper than any other area in England with estimated industrial job losses of 63% between 1971 and 2005 (Turok and Edge 1999:51). In 2011 secret cabinet papers were released by the National Archives under the 30 year rule which revealed many in Thatcher's cabinet wanted to write off Liverpool and the surrounding areas. They told her that the "unpalatable truth" was that they could not halt Merseyside's decline and warned her not to waste money trying to "pump water uphill" (Travis 2011).

Despite the negativity towards Merseyside investment has steadily flowed into the area since the 1980s which has seen, for example, in Liverpool, the regeneration of the famous Albert Docks, a 25 year project to clean up the river Mersey, and in more recent times the Kings Waterfront Development, which includes a new Arena and Convention Centre which aims to transform the city's national and international status. Likewise in Knowsley investment has been ploughed in to building new schools, youth clubs and sports and leisure complexes. This has included millions of pounds of public investment in Stockbridge Village (previously known as Cantril Farm) in an attempt to try and rejuvenate the local area.

In spite of this investment Knowsley today is still considered to be in the top five most deprived boroughs in England and has high levels and concentrations of deprivation, violent crime (involving drugs, gangs and weapons), poor health, and lower levels of attainment and educational achievements.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated around 50% of residents live in the 10% most deprived super output areas (SOAs) of the country and officially current levels

(July 2013) of unemployment in the area stand at 5.6% for adults and 11.4% for 18-24 year olds.<sup>35</sup> However, research conducted by Sheffield Hallam University argues there is a “hidden unemployment” where people who are out of work either fail to qualify for jobseeker’s allowance (JSA) or are diverted onto other benefits. Researchers suggest the real level of overall unemployment in Knowsley in 2012 stood at 16.8% which is considered the highest rate in the country (Beatty, et, al. (2012:29).

*“Knowsley [just before the austerity cuts] has had 7 new learning centers, new leisure center, and a new youth center which has [all] cost millions. There is new plans for the town center what the locals call the ‘townie’. On the back of this you would think people would be a bit more positive about the future. But what you find is the kids are still trapped in this apathy trap of: ‘so what it’s not going to affect us’ - ‘at the end of the day it aint going to get me a job’. This once again goes back to a generation of hopelessness.” Knowsley Police Officer*

In short, Knowsley provides an extreme example of the consequences of rapid economic decline and long-term structural unemployment. The research site clearly exhibits all those characteristics recognized as those which obstruct young people’s transition to the workforce and in addition create a fertile environment for the manifestation of social exclusion. And while it is important to note that Merseyside in general is renowned for its humour, friendliness, and solidarity – the power of economic forces which have led to

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<sup>38</sup> Knowsley Labour Market Bulletin July 2013: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/Labour-Market-Bulletin-July-2013.pdf> - accessed 12.10.13

decades of industrial decline has certainly taken its toll on the people, place and identity as this research will aim to show.



## **4. Five Cameos of Youth Transition In Knowsley**

### **4.1 Mike, Amanda, Brian, Rebecca, and Jessica**

*Please note all names of young people and stakeholders interviewed have been altered or removed to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.*

#### **4.1.1 Exploring Individual Biographies**

Following in the footsteps of Johnston, et, al. (2000) I have decided that instead of describing all 28 interviews, I will present five cameos which typify the experiences of most of the participants in their navigation of different paths and processes, in an environment where social exclusion and unemployment are widespread. By exploring individual biographies in depth I aim to illustrate how limited personal agency and large scale structural controls have both had a profound influence on the lives and circumstances of young people. Three of the participants chosen are female and the other two male. While all have experienced different transitions, it should be noted that the stories of the 5 participants are far from exceptional with perhaps the exception of one (Jessica). I will use some examples from other interviews in this section and later in section 5 to amplify points and highlight the common problems young people face in Knowsley.

#### 4.1.2 Mike: 19 years old, currently a NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

| Age | School-to-work   | Family/housing                         |
|-----|--|--|
| 16  | Leaves school with limited qualifications. Does not continue into further education. Unemployed for a few months.  | Living with Mother in Huyton, Knowsley |
| 17  | Gets an apprenticeship at a local garage and goes to college once a week to do his NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) level 1 & 2 in Motor Vehicle Maintenance. | Pays no board at home                  |
| 18  | Quits mechanic job due to poor relationship with other employees. Unemployed and on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) from March 2012 – November 2012.                     |  |
| 19  | Gets temporary Christmas job at a mail sorting office from mid-November 2012 to first week in January 2013. Back on JSA in New Year.                                 |  |

I met Mike at a local job fair in Huyton (late January 2013), he had mainly been unemployed since March 2012 with the exception of 2 month temporary work at a mail sorting office during the busy Christmas period. Mike came across as a timid, quiet but sensible individual who stated on a number of occasions that he was lacking confidence. Nevertheless he was certainly one of the most articulate of participants and clearly showed a good understanding of the problems and issues that had effected his transition period so far.

Mike struggled at school and did not enjoy many aspects of classroom work and preferred the more practical subjects such as P.E (Physical Education). After finishing school with limited qualifications he eventually, after a few months of unemployment, was offered an apprenticeship as a mechanic at a local garage with the help of a youth training/employment agency. Working with his hands suited Mike and he initially saw this as a career opportunity. However the apprenticeship at the garage did not turn out as well as he had hoped. Reluctant at first to talk about his experience at the garage as it had clearly had a profound negative impact on him. It seems there had been a mixture of issues which had driven Mike to quit after just under a year in the job. These were as follows:

- Poorly managed and negative working environment.
- Poor training, no support, and just ‘ordered about’.
- Low wage £2.65 an hour.
- The youngest employee with no other people around his age.
- Picked on by older colleagues.

This last point is described by the distinguished primatologist Volker Sommer as the ‘bicycling reaction’<sup>39</sup> which takes place in the animal as well as the human world. Sociologist Richard Wilkinson summarizes the bicycle reaction among humans: “There is widespread tendency for those who have been most reduced by low social status, to try to regain it by asserting their superiority over any weaker or more vulnerable groups” (Wilkinson 2005:265). Being the youngest by quite a margin and by coming across as a shy and timid individual perhaps made Mike an ‘easy target’ for some older employees who shared the negative, poorly run and badly managed environment. As Mike put it to me:

*“You can only take so much because they knock you down so much - I just thought no way I can’t do this anymore.”*

Coming from a deprived and single parent background Mike exemplified the characteristics of many young people I met in Knowsley. Mike appeared to have extremely low self-esteem and hoped the apprenticeship would boost his confidence and provide him with support during his transition. But this unfortunately did not materialize:

*“Going into a new place as the new kid you rely on others to build your confidence. For example, the more I get to know them (work colleagues) the more confident I can become and then I can build on that, but they wouldn’t let me get to know them.”*

He stated he never had a role model or someone who looked out for him while working at the garage and without that support Mike felt he was too young to deal with the garage environment. Even though he came away with both NVQ level 1 and 2 in Motor Vehicle Maintenance he stated clearly that he did not want to go back into the mechanic trade and would only do so as last resort. At present he was happy to take on any job that would provide him with work

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<sup>39</sup> The image of a person bending forward with hands on the handlebars while kicking back on the pedals, in

skills and more importantly give him some confidence. Being out of work for most of 2012 had taken its toll on Mike; it seemed his first job experience at the garage had set him back mentally and that he was still recovering from the experience when I spoke to him in January 2013. When I asked him about the future he made an interesting point:

*“I want to see how it goes I don’t want to look too much into it. I think I’ll take it step by step. If you look too far into it then you might push yourself to much to get there and I just don’t want to waste the time. If you take it step by step you can build yourself up to it. If it happens then it happens, if it doesn’t then you’re not knocked down by it - just get back on it. There might be something out there just keep looking”*

With such low self-esteem and aspirations for the future I would argue that Mike has put-up a defence mechanism to shield him from being ‘knocked down’ again. From what I could determine he put a lot of effort into the mechanic job and after being ‘knocked down’, he felt like it had not been worth the time and effort. Whatever path he takes next he wants to take it ‘step by step’ to protect his mental health in anticipation that once again it might all fall through.

Ideally Mike wants to become a football coach teaching younger kids. He told me the local job centre had made a note of this and would phone him if anything came up in the area. When I asked him about what he had done himself to find such work he stated he had asked at some local clubs and sports

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centres but nothing was available. Interestingly, when I told him about organization abroad that he could volunteer for such as ‘Camp America’ which offer 9 week placements to teach football to children in America it was not the cost involved (flights, visa, accommodation) that put him off but the time away from home.

Mike only wanted to work in the Merseyside area as he did not feel comfortable venturing anywhere else. Even if he had the money, going abroad for 2 months was unlikely as being away from his family and friends was inappropriate under his circumstances. For example, Mike has a strong group of friends who are all in a similar situation to him (from deprived backgrounds struggling to get by in an insecure environment). Because of this their friendship is essential to their own security and comfort. As Mike put it when explaining his network of friends, “we stick together through thick and thin”. If Mike left Knowsley for a few months he was very scared that his mates would disown him for abandoning them to go off and do his own thing.

This belief fitted in some respects with what a young girl I interviewed told me about her brother who was unemployed and whose options were limited due to the relationship he had with his friends:

*“If one of them goes off and gets a job then they lose their roots and they don’t want to be doing that. The rest will probably disown him. It never used to be like that, it’s only recently with the recession and the amount of jobs available. They all used to be able to get work. Now maybe only 2 out of 10 will find work.”*  
- Samantha 20 years old.

This is a good example of how the structural controls which surround the transition of Mike and other young males limit their own personal agency as consequence of their locality being fundamental to their wellbeing. I concluded the interview by asking Mike what he thought about the current

situation he and his friends found themselves in. Mike was clear in his response:

*"We need more time to boost our confidence we need support. At a young age I feel we are thrown more and more responsibility. We are made to stand on our own two feet a lot younger than we should"*

For young people like Mike who come from a disadvantaged background with limited social support and structure in their lives, leaving school at the age of 16 and being made to stand on his own two feet has not strengthened his character or enhanced his independence. Indeed, in some respects this transition has only served to weaken what limited confidence and self-assurance he originally had after finishing school. One can imagine that without the correct support and structure that Mike badly needs further setbacks could have severe ramifications for his future employment opportunities and transition into adulthood.

**4.1.3 Amanda: 23 years old, currently in full-time job (contract expires March 2013)**

| Age    | School-to-work  | Family/housing  |
|--------|---|---|
| 16 -17 | Leaves schools with poor grades but managed to get on a NVQ Diploma course in Beauty Therapy General at Knowsley college. The course is 5 days a week (09.00-16:30). At the same time she does two cleaning jobs. One from 06:30-08:30 before college and one after from 17:00-19:00. | Living with Mother in Huyton, Knowsley. Has paid 'keep' (board) to mother since leaving school at 16. |
| 18     | Struggling financially so quits college course before completion and gets a job in a bar.   |   |
| 19-22  | Works in several temporary jobs: Cook/Server in a School Canteen, Hospital Cleaner, and a Bar tender in a pub.  |   |
| 22     | Unemployed for 7 months.  |   |
| 23     | Gets job in a call centre (30 hours a week contract expires March 2013).  |   |



When I sat down to chat with Amanda it became apparent early on that she had a lot on her mind. She talked extremely fast during the interview and could not fully relax – it seemed the stress of her current lifestyle was visible to see. At 23 years of age Amanda was still living with her mother who has been getting by on Incapacity Benefits (around £5800 a year) for many years. As a result, since leaving school Amanda has supported her mother by paying ‘keep’ (lodging/board). To be able to pay her mother she took on two part-time cleaning jobs while doing a full time college course but this eventually became too much for her to handle. She did successfully apply for an EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) grant which allows students struggling financially to claim up to £1200 a year to help pay for costs like transport, lunch, and college equipment. However, this grant along with her two part-time jobs were not enough to comfortably cover her living costs and thus when she turned 18 she decided to quit college and take a full time job in a town bar where at weekends alone she stated that she could earn around £150. Earning good money in a bar was a big allure to Amanda who was “sick of living on a shoe string budget at college”.

From there Amanda has had a string of temporary jobs to get by on including, canteen, cleaning, and pub work. At the age of 22 she was unemployed for 7 months which was her longest period out of work since finishing school at 16. During this time she planned to go back to college to do a one day a week hair, make-up, and beauty course but the course got cancelled.

*“They wanted me to buy all the equipment for the course [around £100] in one week. Well everyone [who had signed up] just panicked and no one turned up the next day – so they ended up calling the course off”.*

After the disappointment of the course cancellation her best friend’s father helped her back into work with a job offer at a call centre which she is

presently in. She stated she is happy with the £800 a month salary and she is treated fine by her manager (best friend's farther). However, the call centre in general is not doing very well and it may close down in March 2013 which is when her contract runs out. Due to the company's poor balance sheets there is a huge amount of pressure on Amanda to 'cold' sell insurance packages to people over the phone.

*"Every day he [the manager] is coming in saying come on PUSH PUSH PUSH [referring to sell sell sell]. I'm under so much pressure its unreal and I'm coming home so stressed. I'm dreading to go work every day and I don't want to feel that way."*

Amanda is trying very hard to meet her targets but finds it difficult to sell over the phone to strangers.

*"A lot of people can be very aggressive on the phone [to deal with] it's really difficult at times...I would rather be happy in my job, I would rather earn less to be happy in a job."*

When I met Amanda she was spending the day looking for a new job as the call centre it seemed was affecting her mental wellbeing. Yet, she did not regret taking the job on as it had got her out of a long-term spell of unemployment and she recognized that she had developed and gained some good skills such as communicating well over the phone. She made it clear that after being unemployed for 7 months that she would not quit the call centre until another job is lined up. Preferably she wanted a 'nine to five' job with a lot less stress attached.

*"I would be so happy with a nice nine to five job Monday to Friday that would do me brilliant that. But I would like to be in a job that I enjoyed, I've never been so stressed in my life the last few months - because this job is too much pressure on my head and I worry a lot, I worry really bad. I worry so much about not having a job"*

Finding a new job is not easy for Amanda and for many young people in Knowsley transportation is a mayor issue when finding work.

*“I’ve seen a few jobs offers today but the jobs are too far away. So I’m thinking whether the travel is worth going for the money I might be earning. It wouldn’t be problem if I had a car. I mean where is Broad Lane Kirby? Is it worth the bus travel costs to do the job?”*

Amanda at present does not have a driving license but aims to get one in the near future even though she is very concerned about passing the theory (written) test. Amanda is also very unsure about the future; further education looks unlikely under her own economic conditions

*“I would like to go back to college but I’m thinking moneywise...You see I just need a little bit of help as I haven’t got a clue with certain things. It goes through one ear and out the other and then I panic about whether I’m going to be in a dead end job for the rest of my life - do ya know what I mean – I don’t want to end up like that!”*

Amanda pointed out that she gets worried about not knowing how to do things and feels stupid asking for help, such as filling in forms or sending off job applications. She knows that she is much more suited for practical work and can work hard in whatever sort of role that would involve. Hence her sister and auntie think she should purchase a car (once she has passed her driving test) and set up a “little cleaning business” – going around cleaning people’s homes. This is something Amanda is very positive about.

*“That would do me that, I know it’s only cleaning but it’s something isn’t it.”*

Lastly I ask Amanda if she had ever thought about leaving the local area to find work. This had never crossed her mind and even the thought of it visibly worried and disturbed her. She likes Huyton and does not mind the housing estate she lives on.

*“Everyone I know lives around here all my friends, auntie, my sisters, are all around the area which is alright. It would be really scary to think I had to move away to find work, I need to see my family during the week.”*

It was clear to see that Amanda's family and friends are very important to her own wellbeing and social life. I would argue that the poor economic conditions that she and her family find themselves in have without doubt limited Amanda's work and educational opportunities since leaving school. Being someone who worries a lot, her unstable stressful job combined with limited career prospects only intensifies her natural worried state. Nevertheless, even under these conditions there is still a sense of optimism in her life with goals and future aims of passing her driving test and becoming self-employed in a small cleaning business.

#### 4.1.4 Brian: 21 years old, currently temping on and off with local job agency

| Age    | School-to-work  | Family/housing   |
|--------|---|--|
| 15 -18 | Left school at 15 and started work straight way as a painter and decorator with his farther.                        | Lives with Mother in Page Moss, Knowsley.<br><br>Pays no board at home |
| 18     | Fathers business goes bankrupt so he is laid-off.<br><br>A period of unemployment.                                  |  |
| 19     | Gets an apprenticeship laying bathrooms and does his NVQ Level 2 in Construction – laid-off the job after 6 months. |  |
| 19-21  | Does agency work: temping 3 weeks here, 2 weeks there in all sorts of unskilled jobs. Many periods on JSA.          |  |

A local youth club organizer introduced me to Brian who was with his best friend James at the time. I have chosen Brian over James because he spoke more and gave me a much greater understanding of his transition period. Both

Brian and James's stories are very similar as their difficult transition and environment has meant they have stuck closely together for backing and support. Both lads would fit in to the stereotype of what Nayak (2003) calls 'The Charver Kids' or what the locals would sometimes refer to as 'Scallies'<sup>40</sup>. Dressed in track suit top and bottoms (trackies) and wearing baseball caps their appearance, which could be considered more of an urban street uniform, is a form of lower-class identity that allows them to 'fit in' with other socially excluded young people in the area (Nayak 2003). Of course, this urban 'identity' along with what I considered to be an aggressive 'biting' attitude, is perhaps a defence mechanism to the way in which they have been treated within society and which appears to have had major ramifications for their school to work transition. The youth club organizer who introduced me to Brian and James told me latter:

*"They are no angels if you know what I mean, but they aren't bad lads and more than anything just need some direction."*

Brian left school at 15 (turned 16 a month after finishing school) and went straight into working for his father's small painting and decorating business. At 18 his father's business went bankrupt forcing Brian to sign up on JSA for a period of time. Nevertheless, thanks to a government incentive scheme at 19 years of age Brian got an apprenticeship fitting bathrooms which included a compulsory 1 day a week at college doing an NVQ Level 2 in Construction. After completing the qualification the government funded scheme automatically stopped. Instead of being kept on by the company Brian was laid-off and went back on JSA. Brian informed me that he received under £500 per month for doing his apprenticeship but believed the company was receiving £800 a month off the government for each young person they

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<sup>40</sup>Scallie is originally short for Scallywag, a term used as a name of a subculture of working class youth who had adopted a street fashion including the wearing of branded sportswear often with a baseball cap and with a hoodie

employed. When the funding ended the company did not see any financial reason to keep Brian and other young apprentices on.

Since the apprenticeship finished Brian has been temping with job agencies, working on and off for around 2 years. This has involved as Brian put it:

*“Three weeks here, two weeks there in all sorts of shit jobs”*

This has badly affected Brian as the lack of stability by being thrown from one bad job to another has created an absence of certainty in his life which has frustrated him immensely.

*“All we want [referring to him and James] is like a steady permanent job. Is that too much to ask for!”*

Brian argued that he finds himself in a catch 22 situation when it comes to finding decent work.

*“I would like to buy a car so I can open my options to work available. The problem is you never know when you’re going to get laid-off. I can only afford to run a car with a full-time job.”*

Brian informed me at the time of interview that he and James have had no agency work for the last few weeks and therefore spent much of their time just wandering around the local area.

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*"We were saying before you'd think on days like today [icy January morning] the council would employ a load of unemployed lads and get them shovelling grit around the place."*

*"I worked for £95 a week for 8 months and I got by, it's about being out [of] the house."*

Brian's appearances and the fact that he has a criminal record make him a target for police harassment. Both he and James are apparently stopped and searched by local police on a regular basis. This includes strip searches in the back of local police vans. Usually, according to Brian, the police will taunt, bully, and disrespect him and other young people. This has created a huge amount of animosity and lack of trust towards the police.

*"The police think everyone from around here is up to no good...I would say about 20% of the police are alright but the other 80% are out of order."*

*"The police are legal gangsters everyone not just kids our age - everyone knows what they're like. I'm not saying everyone dislikes them but everyone knows what they're like and this has meant the community sticks together more I think."*

*"I was on the way to the doll [job centre] to speak with my personal advisor when I got stopped by the police for a stop and search. I ended up being late for my appointment which meant I had to sit and wait for three hours to see my advisor."*

After the interview I went back to the youth organizer who had introduced me to Brian to get his views on the local police. I thought he might have a different opinion but it seemed his views were in line with Brian's:

*"I once saw two young lads pinned up against a brick wall by two community officers, these aren't even official police! Well I knew one of the young lads so I stopped to ask if everything was okay. The officer just turned to me and told me to get lost – if this is how they treat me, then you can imagine how they speak to the kids." - Youth Club Organizer*



A few days after speaking with Brian I interviewed a local police officer who was working with schools to build better relationships between the police and local young people. The frank and candid interview I had with the police officer clearly supported Brian's perceptions:

*"Not many people in Knowsley like the police and this goes back many years...Although I believe it is improving... Unfortunately we have to stereotype that's just the job we do...Some officers, not all, go too far. The usual attire you know if the kid has black trackies bottoms and a black North Face coat then they [the police] just presume they're all thugs and it's not the case. Unfortunately a lot of the training, not so much now [after the UK riots], but in the past was initiated to target these types of kids."*

In regards to the strip searches described by Brian as dehumanizing the Police officer had this to say:

*"I'm not saying it doesn't go on I would like to think it doesn't but you have to listen to the kids and I think they are right. I tell the kids if they're not happy at their treatment they should go down to the police station and report what happened."*

Much of what has been stated here fits with a 2012 report on young people in Knowsley which indicated that a combination of heavy policing and 'silly' rules for young people made walking the streets a constant hassle for certain young people (Howarth 2012:11). As one young person put it:

*"The police are pathetic – they will stop a group of three young people and tell them to walk in a two and a one so they're not a group!" (Howarth 2012:11)*

It is not only the Police that Brian has trouble with, the local job agencies according to Brian 'use and abuse' young people like him.

*“A few months ago we both signed up to an agency in Liverpool, they told us they’d phone us when jobs came available – two weeks passed so we phoned them up and when we gave our names the woman just said there was no work available at the moment. So we phoned back later pretending to be new people and guess what the agency said there were many jobs available. When we revealed our true identities the woman on the phone started going back on what she’d said and made some excuse up.”*

Brian informed me that he knew the agency received money for each person they signed up and that he believed they were in fact just being used. It had cost Brian and James £7 each in bus fares to make their way over to Liverpool that day. Receiving only £56.80 a week on JSA, Brian indicated that £7 is a lot of money to waste. As a result, when they got told to travel to the town of Runcorn (10 miles away) to sign up to another job agency – they decided against it.

*“I’m not wasting £10 [in bus fare] to be used again - forget that!”*

Both Brian and James are extremely frustrated with their current situation and have become very cynical, negative, and angered by their experiences. Unfortunately, it would seem that this attitude and behaviour which has perhaps intensified over time will only further isolate them from the job market. Indeed some local social workers I spoke with suggested these conditions make young people like Brian and James easy targets for local but highly organized criminal gangs to recruit vulnerable socially excluded males who are fed up with their circumstances and are in need of money, belonging and sense of purpose.

**4.1.5 Rebecca: 24 years old, currently in full-time employment (6 month contract)**

| Age    | School-to-work  | Family/housing                                     |
|--------|---|--|
| 15     | Has Saturday job whist at school.   | Living with family in Huyton, Knowsley             |
| 16-18  | Basic college course for 2 years, weekend retail job on the side.   |  |
| 18     | Finishes college and starts working for a camera shop in Knowsley.  | Moves into flat with boyfriend in Huyton, Knowsley |
| 19 -20 | Promoted to 'Head of Complaints and Repairs' at the camera shop and before long is running the day to day operations of the whole shop. |  |
| 22.5   | The camera shop goes into administration - made redundant. Gets a temporary job working on the counter at a local newsagent.            |  |
| 23     | Receives at nine month apprenticeship with a social housing association.  |  |
| 24     | Finishes apprenticeship and awarded a full-time 6 month contract.   |  |

As I explain Rebecca's story it may seem clear to the reader that she would be considered by the American sociologist, Charles Murray, as a fine example of the 'respectable working class'. Since 15 Rebecca has always had work. As she puts it:

*"I've been working since I was 15, I hate been out of work. I would rather be doing something for nothing than not doing anything at all!"*

At 15 while in high school she got a Saturday job to earn some money and continued working weekends in a retail job while doing a 2 year basic college course from 16 to 18 years of age. After finishing college she got a full time job in a local camera shop. In due course this full time work meant she could afford to move out of the family home and find a place with her boyfriend. By working hard and showing initiative at age 19 Rebecca was promoted to 'Head of Complaints and Repairs'. Rebecca's experience and competences meant it was not long before she was, in her own words basically running the whole shop and the day-to-day operations. She gained huge amounts of skills and experience in this position and looked at doing a college qualification that tied in with her position at work. Unfortunately, the camera shop had no affiliation with any of the local colleges and as a result she could not take on any qualifications that were underpinned by her job.

At the age of twenty two and a half the camera business that she had been part of for 4.5 years went into administration. Rebecca was made redundant with little compensation. This whole experience for Rebecca was difficult to manage:

*“After four and a half years in a job it was the worst feeling in the world going into the ‘doll office’. My confidence dropped so much I was doing management level work basically running the whole shop and operations. But on paper I was still only considered a shop assistant. When the place closed down I couldn’t get any evidence to prove what I had been doing for the last few years. At the job centre in their eye’s I was just a shop assistant.”*

Rebecca had received a really good reference but because the place was no longer an operating business there was no one to prove that she had been in that position. Therefore, the job centre would only offer her low level shop floor jobs. Having bills to pay (rent and utility bills) she took a temporary job on the counter at a local newsagent. Going from a managerial position at the camera shop to working on the shop tills (cash register) in a newsagent was obviously difficult for Rebecca. I got the feeling throughout the interview that Rebecca (like many from the interview sample) struggled with her self-esteem. Having a job with responsibility and empowerment had helped lift Rebecca’s self-respect. When she lost this job and the authority which went with it, understandably this saw a reduction in her levels of self-esteem and confidence.

Her situation was further exacerbated by the way she was treated at the local Job centre:

*“I turned up in full work suit, jacket and such, doing job searches and doing everything I can. Going around Huyton and Liverpool handing out my CV everyday. But they [Job Centre] still just treat you like you’ve turned up looking like a scruff not bothering at all...It just makes you feel like you’re not worth anything”*

*“The job centre is a horrible place to go... but at the same time I can understand why they [the staff] have that attitude with them [certain young people] as they go in with their trackies and they just want their [dole] money. I see kids coming in stinking of weed, and then I see them sparking up [smoking illegal drugs] outside [the job centre] afterwards.”*

Rebecca was visibly angered and upset by how the staff at the job centre had treated her no differently to the young people who were less inclined to find work. In addition, because Rebecca had been in work for a while she was not considered by the job centre as ‘high priority’. People who had been out of work for some time got a lot more help and support. For example, Rebecca was angered that the job centre never informed her about a big youth job fair event taking place at the new Liverpool Echo Arena. Luckily she found out about the fair the day before from a friend but was annoyed even more when she turned up to see that all the youth from her local job centre in their ‘trackies’ had attended<sup>41</sup>.

*“You could see the difference between who wanted a job and who didn’t”*

According to Rebecca the job fair was excellent and offered lots of free help and courses for young people, including, first aid and health and safety courses, as well as workshops in CV writing and mock job interview training. Unfortunately, however, most of the apprenticeships available that day were only available for people under the age of 21 or 22. Despite this disappointment she eventually came across one apprenticeship with a housing association that had an age limit of up to 24 years. After three successful interviews with the company Rebecca began a 9 month apprenticeship at the age of 23.

The apprenticeship paid around £2.65 an hour which for a 23 year old with rented accommodation made it hard to financially survive on. Nevertheless, she enjoyed the new job, as Rebecca put it: “You just have to make the best out of the situation”. During the nine month apprenticeship she was well

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<sup>41</sup> These young people apparently had to turn up or their social benefits would be stopped.

supported by a team of people in a business that was well run and had good financial stability. The training included working for a period of time in different departments where she got to build rapport, respect, and friendship with many managers and employees. Rebecca was part of a group of six apprentices who at times worked together and got to organize events and different projects serving to enhance their skills and abilities. Following the completion of the 9 month apprenticeship, all 6 trainees were offered 6 months full-time contracts in the contact centre department.

Rebecca hopes this 6 month contract will be extended to 12 months and then perhaps even permanently. Of course, not knowing if she will be kept on is, as she remarked, “scary and the best thing to do is not think about it!” She stated she would gladly go back to her £2.65 apprenticeship money just to stay on as the job is more than just a job to her. I would argue working for this organization provides Rebecca with a sense of purpose and social support which is extremely important for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds like Rebecca.

*“None of the apprentices that start here want to leave. Work gets done but in a good and calm environment where everyone has a good laugh and looks out for one another.”*

Rebecca was perhaps fortunate to find this job with little help from the job centre and being at the top bracket of apprenticeship age limit. Although at present she is still earning a low wage the job itself rather than the money is what is important to her. Having experienced a difficult time since being made redundant from the camera shop, the new job offers her hope, contentment, and for the time being stability in her work life.

#### 4.1.6 Jessica: 17 years old, currently on 7 week unpaid work experience placement

| Age   | School-to-work  | Family/housing                           |
|-------|---|--|
| 13-15 | Sells chewing gum and candy to kids at school apparently making on average £20 profit per day.  | Living with mother in Huyton, Knowsley   |
| 16    | Leaves school with limited qualifications and prefers not to continue in education: July 2011.<br><br>October 2011: Finds job at a building contractor in admin office. |  |
| 16    | Business goes into administration, made redundant March 2012.   |  |
| 16-17 | Goes to college and does some basic paid courses in beauty. On the side sells beauty products to young people in her area.  |  |
| 17    | January 2013: offered 7 week unpaid work experience placement at large local office business in Prescot.  |  |
|       |   | Will pay 'keep'(board) when she turns 18 |



Jessica was by far the most confident, outgoing, relaxed and self-assured young person I met in Knowsley. We talked for well over an hour on a number of subjects - as Jessica stated: "I could talk all day you know". Jessica's transition is far from ordinary but provides a good contrast to the other four case studies. One might argue, that being one of the youngest interviewed, Jessica has not been exposed to some of the difficulties that others older than her have experienced. Nevertheless, as this story unfolds it may become clear to the reader that Jessica's resourcefulness and unorthodox methods has meant that she has not experienced problems navigating her way around the local economy and that with good support from her family her ambition are unusually high for a young person from a deprived area.

Jessica's entrepreneur talents began at an early age as she recalls:

*"When I was in year 7 I use to sell 'chewies' [a form of candy] to all the kids on the yard [school playground]. You know what, that was the most money I've ever made. I use to make £20 profit a day!"*

By the time she reached 15 she stopped this venture as in her words: "it wasn't cool to sell sweets to 12 year old kids when you're 15 - if you get me." At school she became known as a little 'Del Boy'<sup>42</sup> for her profit seeking ventures. One of these schemes included her and her identical twin sister buying "a load of fruit off a back of a lorry" and then reselling it at the local outdoor market when they were just 16 years of age. Although Jessica stated that they did not make much money off this project it was still a "good laugh" and experience.

*"We are always up for making money - me and my sister are always thinking of new ways to make money."*

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<sup>42</sup> "Del Boy", is a happy-go-lucky fictional character in a beloved BBC sitcom - primary known for his 'wheelings and dealings' in a poor area of London.

After finishing school in July 2011 she had 2.5 months of what she called holiday before finding a job in the admin office of a building construction firm. In March 2012 the business went in to administration. In the month leading up to the bankruptcy the office atmosphere turned very hostile. Jessica informed me that in-house fighting began, company directors stole important files, and some people just stopped working – “it was all madness” Jessica remarked.

It seems, Jessica’s first real job ended in an environment of business anarchy and although it sounded like a terrible experience to be part of, Jessica, however, looked back on this chaos in amusement when recalling the events to me. This only strengthened my view that Jessica was mentally very strong, and extremely self-assured.

*“I think I’m clever - I’m probably not but I still think it.”*

She noted that academically she struggled in school but knows deep down she has talents and skills that are perhaps less tangible but are still very useful and have served her well as she navigates her way through the trials and tribulations of life in Knowsley.

After losing her first job Jessica was not sure what to do next. First she anticipated getting another job but after a long conversation with her sister about the prospect of setting up a beauty salon she decided to use the money she had saved from her first job to enrol on a number of paid beauty courses (nail, face, hair, etc.). While doing these courses she found out about a ritual in India where women shave their heads once a year which a company then sells to Western markets. Jessica paid £400 for a large box of this hair to be sent from India. By the time it had arrived, Jessica, through her vast network of

friends and acquaintances had orders for every piece of hair in the box<sup>43</sup>. She stated she made a nice profit on this venture but later got a letter from the British Revenue and Customs Office demanding she pay £300 in tax. Fortunately, by knowing about a certain loop hole in the British tax system Jessica phoned up HM Revenue and Customs and argued the delivery was a sample box (first order) which eventually led to the UK tax invoice being removed.

After finishing her beauty courses a local youth career agency put her on to an unpaid 7 week work experience placement at a large office business in Prescot (which she was currently in at time of interview). After she completes this 7 week experience there is an opportunity if successful to receive a 9 month apprenticeship. The apprenticeship is £2.68 an hour which Jessica is far from keen on.

*“How am I supposed to live off that! When I turn 18 my mum will expect keep. So I would have to pay £15 a week on a bus pass just to get here, then £3-4 a day on lunch, £40 keep [board]...that’s about £75 altogether...I would get £30 [have left] a week for 40 hours work – it’s a joke isn’t it!*

*“Once you leave school you’re trying to build a life for yourself aren’t ya. You might need a car for work or want a car for your independence.. You might need a house, you want a job but you can’t start building a life for yourself on a £100 a week can ya.”*

*“How do you expect someone earning £2.68 an hour, who has to pay ‘keep’ to their mum, afford to live, I heard about certain mums who will throw them out if they don’t pay ‘keep’. The government doesn’t realize that kids are getting kicked out because they can’t afford to pay. One friend of mine nearly had to move into a [government supported] flat she would then be stuck in a cycle of Job Seeker Allowance. That would have ruined her whole future. Luckily she moved in with her auntie.”*

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<sup>43</sup> Hair extensions are very popular among teenage girls in Merseyside.

Although Jessica is highly critical of the apprenticeships salary and is unlikely to take on the one which may become available to her she still thinks they are a good idea in general:

*"I guess these jobs [apprenticeships] are good for people like me who don't want to continue into college...it allows you to work your way in to a company...so if I go for a job after finishing school and I'm up against someone who has 6 years of experience in office work I've got no chance – so apprenticeships can be good for us who don't want to continue in education, who want to work instead."*

Jessica stated she wanted to leave the apprenticeship door open but at present is applying for other jobs which include two interviews that are already lined up at two local solicitors (reception work).

*"I don't want to focus on one thing [career path], so I'm always thinking about other options. I don't want to get stuck in one job...I just need some money, so I can save up for our next little adventure!"*

When she turns 18 both she and her sister plan to set up an account with a local Credit Union. Apparently, if she puts £2500 in to the Credit Union (which she has saved up from her first job) then she can borrow £7000 in return<sup>44</sup>. With her sister doing the same, together they will have at least £14,000 to set up a small 'unique' beauty salon which they believe there is a market for in Huyton. Jessica also talked about the prospect of combining the retail property with a flat above so she could also start her housing rental business at the same time. I suggested this might be a lot to take on for such a young person to which Jessica replied:

*I know, I take too many risks - I'm like a gambler....I'll either have loads of money [in the future] or I'll have none!"*

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<sup>44</sup> Credit Union offer low interest rate for its members.

Jessica is aware she lacks the pragmatism that is perhaps needed with having so many ideas in her mind. Luckily, according to Jessica, her sister is more “down to earth and level headed”. Jessica is the creative one with lots of enthusiasm for her possible ventures, however, - “if it wasn’t for my sister I would probably be bankrupt by now”. Her sister plays an important role by evaluating the logistics of her ideas properly and thus brings her “down to earth”. This means they work well as a business team balancing out each other’s weaknesses.

Jessica is certainly a ‘happy-go-lucky’ character who is clearly relaxed about the future. The chaos that surrounded her in her first real job seems to have had no impact on her transition and confidence. People like Jessica who just make the best out their situation are perhaps ‘roll-models’ for the Government’s new policy of instilling more character and resourcefulness into young people so they can better deal with the post-school environment. However, from my sample Jessica’s talents and approach to life are extremely rare to come across (especially in deprived areas like Knowsley) and I would also suggest these characteristics are not something that can be easily taught to others. In addition, Jessica is still young and naive and perhaps she will find her transition more difficult as she matures. For now however, her strong family support which includes a healthy bond with her identical twin sister combined with her unconventional approach to life has expanded and enhanced her own human agency in an environment that for others has been highly structured with limited options available.

## **5. Understanding School-to-Work Transitions in Young People**

### **5.1 Combining Macro and Micro Worlds**

#### **5.1.1 Common Characteristics of Youth Transitions in Knowsley**

By allowing young people to talk freely about their own school-to-work experiences it has allowed us to see the diversity of transitions within a local deprived area where work opportunities are comparatively limited in scope. No transition is completely the same although some young males I interviewed have similar experiences as ‘sticking together’ under the backdrop of social exclusion is important for their wellbeing. All in all, these five stories have provided us with a way of communicating a number of indicative analytical patterns which connect the participants’ micro environment to the current macro landscape. In the section below, where it is appropriate, I will draw on the content of other participants to emphasise my points and strengthen my arguments as I explore three key patterns of youth transition in Knowsley.

#### **5.1.2 The Importance and Influence of Locality**

The importance of locality is not something new in understanding young people. In a 1978 survey conducted by the European Economic Commission (EEC) of its member states, it was suggested that unemployed 15-24 year olds across all EU countries displayed exceptional ‘intransigence’. Suggesting they were least willing to lower their expectations, learn fresh skills and move to different towns, and are more likely to regard it as sound advice to refuse unsatisfying work, and to seek jobs in the black economy (EEC, 1979 cited in Roberts et, al. 1984). Thirty-five years later under a completely different

economic scenario it seems some things have not changed. All 28 participants within the fieldwork sample with the exception of one<sup>45</sup> did not want to leave the vicinity of Knowsley and would only consider looking for work in the Greater Merseyside area. This certainly fits in line with the findings of both Nayak (2003) and Johnston et.al (2000) on the importance of locality within socially excluded areas.

If anything it is a great paradox that so many young people want to continue living in an environment where there are limited well-paid jobs available, poor transportation links, and high levels of crime and street gangs. For example one girl I spoke to who lived with her mother in Page Moss has twice had her front door 'kicked in' by drug addicts. Despite the problems faced by individuals and the wider community, in general the participants talked positively about living in Knowsley. Even Brian, who was perhaps the most socially excluded individual to be interviewed, suggested that there was a good community spirit where everyone 'sticks to together'. From a socio-economic point of view, many residents and young people in Knowsley do not have the expendable wealth to maintain a socially acceptable level of consumption which is perhaps taken for granted in other more affluent areas of the country. As a result, networks of friends and family, in addition to the comfort of local familiarity, help them navigate and cope with the difficulties that arise from limited market involvement.

In this respect, on the one hand the parochialism and localism which limits young people's career opportunities and future prosperity, provides them on the other hand with certain advantages. For instance, Jessica uses her vast network of friends and associates as a market for her 'money making

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<sup>45</sup> A British Asian girl whose family are originally from India and has travelled to Indian on a number of

schemes'. Amanda finally got back into work after 7 months of unemployment with the help of a friend's father, and Rebecca found out about a employment fair through a friend that eventually led to her receiving an apprenticeship and a job she currently enjoys. Even the girl who had her front door 'kicked in' managed to reclaim items that were stolen by knowing the 'right people' who make it their business to know everything that goes on in the local area (local knowledge brokers). In this context, we can understand why even the most out-going self-assured of young people like Jessica is fundamentally rooted to her locality for the comfort, security and the opportunities that it creates.

Understanding the important relationship between a deprived area and locality allows us to identify one of the reasons why according to a 2010 OECD report Britain has one of the lowest levels of social intergenerational mobility in the developed world – with young people more likely to reflect their father's earnings than in any other OECD country<sup>46</sup>. In the post-Fordism environment workers are expected to be flexible and adaptable to fluctuations within the economy. For example, in 2008 the Policy Exchange think-tank, which enjoys strong links with the Conservative Party called on the Government to accept the painful truth that many of the old Northern towns whose roots date back to the industrial revolution have little hope of been regenerated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. The report suggested key port cities such as Liverpool and Sunderland have "failed" and people should be paid to move south (Watt



2008). For young people from more economically secure environments moving to other areas in search of job prosperity is arguably easier to achieve.

However, for young people from deprived communities, where economic scarcity, crime, and class discrimination are all common, coping mechanisms through networks of social support and local familiarity unintentionally roots them further to their locality and lower class culture. This is what Perri 6 (1997:10-11) describes as ‘network poverty’; unlike the middle class, working class people are far less likely to have ties to broader, socially diverse networks of people who can ‘open doors’ to advancing oneself in the labour market and thus transcend the limited socio-economic environment in which they live. With the post-war skilled and reasonably paid manufacturing jobs no longer available in Knowsley many young people’s dependence on their locality serves to exclude them from better paid job opportunities in other areas.

### **5.1.3 Insecure Employment in Insecure Firms**

Reading the five cases studies we see that both Mike’s apprenticeship and Amanda’s call centre job were within businesses which struggled financially. For Amanda this put a lot of pressure on her to sell and reach her targets, and for Mike who was the firm’s youngest employee the negative work conditions created problems which he found difficult to deal with. As for Brian, Rebecca,

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<sup>46</sup> Intergenerational Social Mobility across OECD countries (2010):  
<http://www.oecd.org/centrodemexico/medios/44582910.pdf> - accessed 14.9.13

and Jessica all three had experienced being laid-off as the companies they worked for went in to administration. Amanda found it especially hard to deal with after 4.5 years in a job and Jessica chaotic last month at work is not something I imagine many people would like to experience. Brian perhaps summed it up best having being laid-off on a number of occasions:

*“All we want is like a steady permanent job. Is that too much to ask for!” (repeated quote from page 101)*

The days of state run monopoly industries that were protected from the coercive laws of competition have, as we explained in chapter 2, more or less disappeared. The power of market forces in places like Knowsley is all too evident. In a region with low expendable wealth coupled with economic austerity, it is easy to imagine the power that market forces has over the population. The five case studies illustrate the impact which local economic circumstances made on the transition of each young person. For instance, the contrast between Amanda and Rebecca’s current jobs are remarkable.

*Amanda: “Every day he [the manager] is coming in saying come on PUSH PUSH PUSH [referring to sell sell sell]. I’m under so much pressure it’s unreal and I’m coming home so stressed. I’m dreading to go work every day and I don’t want to feel that way.” (repeated quote from page 96)*

*Rebecca: “None of the apprentices that start here want to leave. Work gets done but in a good and calm environment where everyone has a good laugh and looks out for one another.” (repeated quote from page 109)*

Rebecca is working for a large not-for-profit housing association which is well-funded and not as vulnerable to the power of market forces. Amanda, on the other hand, is working for a privately run call centre trying to compete in a fiercely competitive industry. Clearly, Amanda’s wellbeing is affected by the stress and strain of her work environment. Thatcher believed that expanding the free-market and private ownership would create greater economic

efficiency and social well-being. However, for young people in Knowsley the demise of trade unions power and state run industries combined with the rise of a competitive individualism that Thatcher helped unleash has left some if not many at the mercy of market forces and exploitation.

*"I've been doing the job for 3 years (16-19) and I'm still only on £3.90 an hour. When I turned 19 I should have got a pay rise but because I'm now doing my NVQ level three she said I'm still classed as an apprentice... she told me I'm not getting a pay rise and is more than welcome to find another job that pays better...I thought £3.90 is still money and now she has dropped me a day and I need all the money I can get." Rachel 19 year old hairdresser*

By law Rachel should be earning a minimum of £5.03 an hour<sup>47</sup>. She told me she is sick of being paid a low wage and working long hours and eventually wants out of hairdressing because of the way the industry exploits young people. The Chief Executive at the not-for-profit housing association that 24 year old Rebecca works for had this to say about Knowsley's low wage job market:

*"The local area is signalized by low pay and part time work. Managerial jobs are usually taken by people out of the area. It is one of the lowest and deprived areas for expendable income in the country. That is why we have just adopted the living wage as what we will pay people. Our view is we would prefer to take a hit on our bottom line to pay people what we consider a living wage than a poor people's wage. To give them that wealth that allows them to make choices. This relies on employers being responsible because I believe anything around minimum wage is saying in some respects that it's okay to exploit people" Chief Executive of a large Housing Association*

Unfortunately, it seems there are few businesses that share or have the luxury to offer these sorts of wage conditions under market forces. Job insecurity,

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<sup>47</sup> UK National Minimum Wage Rate (2013): [www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates](http://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates) - accessed 18.10.13

low, illegal and in some cases unliveable wages, and the cyclical motion of ‘recycling and churning’ young people through various permutations of government schemes are all common among those interviewed.

In addition to local businesses and industries competing in ‘the race to the bottom’, young people in Knowsely are also competing with each other over the limited job opportunities available. Rebecca had to go through 3 separate interview processes before she finally succeed in receiving a £2.65 an hour apprenticeship. At the youth job fair I attended in Huyton it was estimated over 400 young people turned up that day and while organizers suggested that around 200 jobs and opportunities were available many of them were low paid, part-time or temporary, and unskilled.

One young male called Alex who attended the employment fair who had been out of work for 18 months had this to say about the situation:

*“I’ll tell you what’s wrong with society – everyone has to fend for themselves, there is no community. Let’s say you lose your job and I’m the one who takes over it – I don’t give a shit about you – we don’t care for one another anymore!” Alex 22 years old*

A young girl I interviewed who of late had successfully acquired an office job stated:

*“I see people my age working in McDonald’s, and think like I’ve got a proper job with experience” Clair 17 year old apprentice*

Getting a ‘proper job’ as Clair calls it is not easy. Competition for the limited ‘proper jobs’ available can create a polarization within disadvantaged groups. We saw in Rebecca’s case how annoyed she became with other young people in her area who she considered to be lazy ‘dole’ dependent scroungers and she was certainly not the only participant from the sample that shared this view. It

is perhaps easy to understand how Rebecca and others who work hard feel in a region that exemplifies high levels of welfare dependency. Nevertheless, as we saw with Brian's story not all young males wearing 'trackies' want to live off benefits. This seems to be a common finding across youth transition research which indicates many young people are willing to work for a poor wage rather than live on the dole (Barry 2005, Johnston et.al 2000:31).

Brian appears to be a by-product of the 'Mcjob' low pay local economy. The post-Fordism era of low skilled, poorly paid and easily replaceable labour has left many young people like him who has limited bargaining power due to his poor qualifications, lack of work experience, financial resources, and social class leave him exposed to market flexploitation'. On the other hand, Rebecca who also has limited bargaining power, has in spite of this managed to achieve a smoother and more successful transition. Why this is the case possibly fits with the next pattern to emerge from the sample.

#### **5.1.4 Comparing and Contrasting Gender Transitions**

Rebecca and Brian's biographies in one respect epitomize Charles Murray's 'deserving' and 'undeserving' theory on the working-class. Rebecca, to use Lord Tebbit's famous quote 'got on her bike' and found work<sup>48</sup>. With a bit of luck and what seemed like a lot of hard work and commitment Rebecca has successfully found a job that brings her meaning and a sense of purpose. She over-came what appeared to be a form of discrimination at the job center and the psychological distress of losing a job with management responsibility in a place she had belonged to for 4.5 years.

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<sup>48</sup> Lord Tebbit a British Politician famous for his much quoted remark: "I grew up in the '30s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot. He got on his bike and looked for work, and he kept looking till he found it." – Lord Tebbit Conference Speech 198 1: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk\\_politics/04/conservative\\_conf/html/4.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk_politics/04/conservative_conf/html/4.stm)

Brian in contrast, cannot hold a job down. His attire, attitude, and criminal record make him subject to discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. Is society to blame for Brian's predicament or is the individual responsible for their own actions? This polarity within the field of social science between structuralist and behaviouralist approaches will continue to rage. However, it appears from my 28 interviews that gender plays an important role in the structure of youth transition in Knowsley.

From my empirical observations, I would argue that in general female participants, were more mature and sensible, resourceful in finding work, tolerant to difficult working conditions, and presented themselves in a better light than their male counterparts. This is illustrated from the five cameos - we see, for example, despite the fact that Amanda found her call centre job extremely stressful, she still tolerated it out of fear of being unemployed. Rebecca after being made redundant at the camera shop did everything possible to get back into work which meant taking a job below her experience level, and Jessica has made sure that she has a number of options available to her after her 7 week work placement finishes.

Undoubtedly, the age and financial situation (i.e. whether the participant is living for free with family, paying board or has their own accommodation) can play a part in a young person's attitude to their working environment. Overall, however, for young men a lack of tolerance to certain working conditions such as in Mike's case at the garage, or the inability to keep a job in Brian's case appears to make the transition of disadvantaged young males more hazardous. This can leave them more vulnerable and exposed to the allure of crime and local organized gangs.

*“Boys around here have got nothing better to do so selling drugs is an answer – that’s the only way they can get money. Samantha 20 years old ”*

*“Lads are a lot more immature, most lads around ours these days get into gangs at an early age, and they tend to stick together” Indira 20 years of age*

I would argue McDowell’s (2002) research on the role which working class masculine identity plays in their transition share similarities with the gender observations within this study. For instance, the days when being a stereotypical working class male, in one sense, was the only qualification needed to acquire a skilled job with an adequate wage are long gone. Leaving school today with poor qualifications and social skills excludes many from the jobs that offer better pay and working conditions. Both Mike (mechanic) and Brian (construction) undertook apprenticeships in what would be considered traditional ‘male trades’ but since leaving these professions both have struggled to adapt and find other employment which could help them in their transition.

For females a different problem occurs in this low pay service environment. Indeed many of the female participants interviewed who left school with limited educational achievements go on and study NVQ’s or find work in typical female oriented industries. These notably include; beauty, retail fashion, hairdressing, and reception work.

*“Knowsley and Liverpool are historically major manufacturing based environments. There isn’t enough been done to encourage girls to go into what are historically male careers.”  
Chief Executive of a large Housing Association*

As we saw in the case of Rachel the hairdresser (quote on p122) and Amanda (call centre) this sort of work offers very limited future prospects. Rachel informed me that at 16 she had the opportunity to do I.T (Information

Technology) at college, but decide instead to undertake a NVQ Level 11 in Hairdressing. She later regretted this decision but at the time (when she was 16 years old) felt like it was the right one. It seems for people like Rachel and Amanda it becomes very difficult for them to move up the career ladder without further education, training or qualifications. Moreover, for girls like Rebecca who found herself unemployed at 22.5 years old the options available were limited for someone without further educational attainments or official management experience. To receive an apprenticeship at what is considered to be a late age of 23 was fortunate, but this is perhaps the best chance for her and others like her to climb the career ladder. Indeed as a girl in a similar position to Rebecca put it when taking about the future:

*“There is so much change going on all the time you really have no idea. But when I started off here all the managers I met had started off as apprentices so that gives you real hope. So you can work your way up.” Susan 21 years of age apprentice*

To conclude, and fitting with both McDowell’s (2002) study and the Riot Reports (2012:8) views on young people (see section 1.1.3) - it seems apparent from these case studies that some young males are marginalized or altogether excluded from the dominant local service sector industry<sup>49</sup>. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. Male youths are more immature than their female equivalents during their transition period.
2. Bonds and pacts made with friends combined with their own masculine pride serve to prevent young males with low tolerance to authority from taking on or putting up with low skilled service work especially if there are stigmas attached.



3. Disadvantaged males are less well suited to the service industry due to their appearance, negative stereotyped image, and poor social skills.

For females in general, finding work in the service sector is less of a challenge and some of the participants interviewed even suggested that certain local employers in Merseyside would only hire females (which is against UK employment law). Nevertheless, the problem for many disadvantaged young people of both sexes who go into these low skilled professions at an early age is that they are at risk of getting trapped in an industry which then limits their future options. Even with good family support such as in the case of Amanda, a lack of financial resources excludes them from attaining other qualifications or opportunities. This means no matter how hard young people from disadvantaged backgrounds work social-mobility is difficult to achieve if you are rooted at the bottom of society.

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<sup>49</sup> This might partly explain why 95% of the UK 2011 rioters were male and only 5% female.  
BBC News - Who are the rioters?: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14489984> -accessed 14.10.13

## 6. Concluding Remarks

*But I know nothing about working-class conditions. I had read the unemployment figures but I had no notion of what they implied; above all, I did not know the essential fact that respectable poverty is always the worst. The frightful doom of a decent working man suddenly thrown on the streets after a lifetime of steady work, his agonised struggles against economic law which he does not understand, the disintegration of families, the corroding sense of shame – all this was outside the range of my experience. When I thought of poverty I thought of it in terms of brute starvation.*

*George Orwell: The Road to Wigan Pier (1987:139, original 1937)*

Orwell's meaningful statement shines a light on the perpetual problems a capitalist society produces for those stuck in poverty. The coercive market conditions experienced in the 1930s which produced mass unemployment and social breakdown, antagonised further by economic laws that were distant and detached from the lives of ordinary people holds remarkable parallels with the economic restructuring of the 1980s and present day austerity measures.

The 'intolerable evil' of unemployment which later became part of the Beveridge Report's (1942) broader 'Five Giant Evils' laid the foundation for the post-war full employment agenda and saw the birth of the modern welfare state. However, the fiscal crisis of the 1970s put an end to this agenda and provided the platform for individualistic ideas within the field of economics to make a return to the political discourse that later became part of Thatcher's ideology. Overtime Thatcher pushed through an economic and legal framework and a cultural ethos which rewarded what she saw as the 'Victorian' or 'bourgeois' values of thrift, self-reliance and charity among all classes (Braithwaite 2013).

*"We want a society where people are free to make choices, to make mistakes, to be generous and compassionate. This is what we mean by a moral society; not a society where the state is responsible for everything, and no one is responsible for the state."<sup>50</sup> Margret Thatcher (1977)*

But this new emerging economy which was driven by an ethos of competitive individualism became a double edged sword. Uneven distribution of investment and capital notably favoured the South of England at the expense of other more traditional Northern regions. Areas where lifelong labour and community were tied to the mill or colliery, rather than providing an increased freedom of opportunity, de-industrialization and the mass job losses that accompanied it served to leave a permanent scar across the socio-economic landscape. The emergence of an 'underclass' of socially excluded people which followed economic restructuring created heated debates about their origins, first in academia and then spilling over into the media as the problem manifested.

After years of indifference and neglect by the Conservative government New Labour in 1997 became the first government to acknowledge and attempt to tackle social exclusion. However, New Labour's 'third way' approach which embraced the 'free market' neo-liberal paradigm seemed counterproductive for those who blamed the marketization of the economy for the rise of an excluded group of people. New Labour's policies were further cast into doubt by a number of ethnographic studies which focused on youth transition in deprived areas. The findings were consistent among researchers, which indicated employment for many young people was usually a temporary experience in an environment where greater labour market flexibility was predominant. Fast

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<sup>50</sup> Margret Thatcher's Speech to Zurich Economic Society (1977):  
<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/103336> - accessed 19.10.13

forward to today and social exclusion continues to be a growing concern for communities across the UK.

This study has tried to give a voice to young people inhabiting a particular de-industrial landscape of contemporary Britain. The research has explored how young people are negotiating their school to work transitions while rooted to the bottom of the labour market and social hierarchy. It seems clear from this study, and in line with increasing qualitative research, that far from observing a new breed of young people who believe 'that their rights outweigh their responsibilities' and who are rebellious, out of control or a threat to the moral order of civilised society, disadvantaged young people are largely conformist and conventional in their behaviour and aspirations (Johnston et al 2000; Barry 2005).

As a final point, I should note that it is perhaps too easy to romanticise or look back on the post-war period with rose-tinted spectacles. Nevertheless, for many young people in Knowsley, life-long labour tied to state industries would appear to offer welcome respite against unemployment, insecurity and a sense of displacement in a setting where unequal distributions of wealth, income and opportunity continue to widen between the social classes.

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